

THIRTY NINE
S E R M O N S

O N

Several Occasions :

By the late REVEREND

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Secret Occasions



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SERMON I.

Of FAITH.

MARK IX. 24.

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.

FROM these words, falling from an affectionate father in the most tender of his concerns, as much as from any definition or description of faith whatsoever (though they make up neither) we may be able to give a reasonable account of our faith in general; as well of the highest perfection it can arrive at on this side vision, as of those imperfections, unavoidable failures, or mixture of unbelief, that the soundest believers do frequently experience: if from hence we enquire into these four general heads.

- I. The nature of divine faith, both in this humble confessor, and in all good Christians: *Lord, I believe.*
- II. The great power of faith: in a double sense, and instances of both in this chapter; 1st. In enabling some to work miracles themselves, as the disciples. And, 2^{dly}, In capacitating
B others

others to have miracles wrought upon them : till the confession was made, the man's son could not be healed.

III. The unavoidable mixture of unbelief, or distrust, even in the soundest faith : *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.*

IV. Lastly, Shall be proposed some means, how to increase our faith, that is, bring it nearer to a certainty, and in some measure clear it of that unbelief.

I. The nature of divine faith, both in this humble confessor, and in all good christians : *Lord, I believe.*

As to the person in the text, we must not suppose him a perfect Christian, nor probably one of Christ's immediate and constant followers, being *one of the multitude*, ver. 17. of the same growth in faith with the nobleman *John* iv. and perhaps the woman and the rest of *Samaria that believed*, and with many others who either saw, or had great miracles wrought upon them, and who are often said to believe ; but as often *go their way*, (Joh. iv. 50.) and we hear no more of them : that is, they were astonished at his doctrine and miracles, and somewhat taken with the goodness of the man, and the goodness of his designs : but whether that astonishment wrought in them such a powerful faith, as to draw along with it a conformity to his precepts, a taking up his cross and following him, cannot so reasonably be concluded.

The faith then of this humble suppliant may not probably reach farther than a belief that
Christ,

Christ, by the power of God, and not that of *Beelzebub*, might be able to command the deaf and dumb spirit out of his son; and, what was the consequent of that belief, that then he was surely a good man; and his doctrine, which those great and well-designed miracles were to warrant of divine authority, although he might not know him to be the immediate son of God; nor believe the indispensable obligation of his laws, upon the penalty of eternal damnation; nor, in a word, perhaps any thing that related to the manner and end of his kingdom, and the great mystery of our redemption.

In this lower degree of faith too, he acknowledges a taint of unbelief; although he did not question the power of God in working such a miracle by that good man Christ Jesus, yet, because it was so much in his own concern, and would prove so unexpected a Blessing (having for many years perhaps despaired of any cure), he could not but a little mistrust, lest there might unhappily be a failure in the performance of so great and comfortable a miracle: it being usual with most of us, even when we have the greatest reason and grounds to expect some great and beneficial good, yet still to be jealous and distrustful of some miscarriage in its conveyance, till we are in actual possession of it: as it is said of *Jacob*, Gen. xlv. 26. though so many of his sons confirmed the good news of *Joseph's* being alive and so great a man in *Egypt*, that his heart fainted, for he believed them not: and likewise of the Apostles themselves, *Luke* xxiv: 41: when Christ was risen from the dead,

and was in person amongst them, that they yet *believed not for joy*. Besides, his faith may well be staggered upon another account : for he had made his application to the disciples before, as appears *ver. 18, 19. and Matt. xvii. 17. 20. Luke ix. 40, 41.* and they could not perform the cure ; but in truth it was want of faith in them, and not in the man.

Now though our faith must be of a larger extent (the mystery of God being so much farther finished) yet is it much of the same nature, and subject to the same infirmities : and the soundest believer may admit those most necessary petitions into his daily prayers : O Lord, increase my faith : *Lord, help my unbelief.*

For though the objects of our christian faith be in themselves as certain as the objects of our senses, yet that certainty cannot appear so great to us : for when the Apostle says, *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*, Heb. xi. 1. he supposes vision itself to be a higher degree of evidence. Nay, in the very notion of a God, to acknowledge whose being we are plainly directed by the very principles of nature, and even forced to by the contemplation of his creatures, the works of his hands ; which must as necessarily suppose his being, as effects do their causes ; yet we may observe humane nature will never permit us so high a degree of evidence even of this first article of our faith, the foundation of all the rest, as of the being of his creatures which are the objects of our senses ; although the truth, being, and existence of the latter wholly depends upon that of the former.

The

The reasons of this unavoidable distrust of the truth of divine matters will fall under another head. Under this, it will be more proper to consider what evidence we have for the truth of those things we profess to believe : which is as great as we are capable of receiving, and as matters of that nature, so remote, and so purely the objects of our understanding, can possibly bear ; and indeed so great, that it argues a man far from rational that with-holds his assent from it ; and the punishment that God hath denounced against unbelievers is but therefore just and adequate measure for such obstinate infidelity, so little encouraged by our reason.

For though it be repugnant to the very nature of faith to demonstrate its truths : yet an easy * syllogism will so infallibly prove them, that it is almost equal absurdity to deny demonstration itself. And we cannot but look upon that man as perversely mad or sottish, that should deny that there were ever any such men in the world as *Julius Cæsar* or *William the Conqueror*, because he is not old enough to have been their cotemporary, and so to have known either one or the other : or that there are any such cities in the world as *Rome* or *Venice*, because he never travelled out of his own country to see them : as we should upon another, that should resolve to deny the truth of what he sees with his eyes, or hath a demonstrative knowledge of. So, in matters of faith, it can be no less a trespass against the common rules of rea-

* Πραγμάτων έλεγχος ή βλεπόμενον, ab ελέγχο arguo, i. e. argumentis demonstro.

son to deny such truths, confirmed by an universal testimony, and the highest evidences they are capable of; and all because not done or delivered in our own times, or within the reach of our own senses; as it is to deny the clearest proposition, or the plainest object of sense: because we have the testimony of other mens senses, though not of our own, who can be supposed to have no more design in deluding us, or imposing upon us, than common historians that tell us of those princes, or travellers that tell us, there are, and that they have seen those forementioned Cities.

In short then, that Christ and his Apostles (to begin this evidence no higher) did such signal miracles as are related of them, was acknowledged by the then present age, never questioned in after-ages as to the matter of fact, not in the main by the very * enemies and such as opposed the christian religion both in their writings and by their power, confirmed by the universal tradition of the Church, and never any schismatick or heretick founded his separation or error upon the negative.

Now, if it be granted, that such miracles were done, it will more easily follow, that they could be done by no other power but that of God. As appears not only from the transcendent greatness and eminency of them, whereby all the power that ever Satan could exert hath been out-done; but also from the tendency of them always to a good end. Satan would never have cast out Satan, or disturbed his own imps. It is not his interest, nor was ever his method of practice, to cure the lame

* Celsus, Porphyry, Julian,

and the blind, or cleanse the leper, who himself is the most inveterate enemy of mankind, and an immediate instrument in all our evils; nor to raise the dead, who first helped to make us obnoxious to that estate: he would have let *Lazarus* rot as well as stink: he would have rewarded *Judas* better than the chief priests did: he would have encouraged *Ananias*, rather than have made him and his wife a standing example of death and infamy, for such serviceable sacrilege.

Besides the most virtuous, religious and peaceable lives of those that wrought the miracles, the manifest simplicity and integrity of all their designs and actions do unanswerably prove they could have their authority and power from none but God, who is infinite power and goodness. Surely the devil, had he had as great power either in his own right or by permission, would never have exercised it so cross to all the politicks of his kingdom, as thereby to raise virtue to the highest pitch of esteem and practice, and establish its lasting obligations in the world.

To go on then, if it cannot be denied but that these miracles were wrought only by the power of God, it will still more easily follow, that whatsoever was delivered by these men (who had this supernatural power to avouch their doctrines) whether purely matters of faith, or precepts and commands that concern our practice, are all most infallibly good and true, and indispensably obliging, as the will of the most high, as that was the power of the most high: because God cannot without blasphemy be supposed to afford his assist-

ance to confirm a falsehood, or countenance an imposture. *If it were not so, I would have told you,* says our Saviour upon a point of faith. It is absurd to imagine the Deity should so play with mankind, as to suffer the most considerable, the most refined and rational part of the world to be deceived; nay, that the highest devotees of true wisdom and virtue should be most shamefully deluded and imposed upon: so that granting the truth of this proposition, that there is a God, it will unanswerably infer the truth of that other, that the Christian religion is the truest: it is an argument of force; our Saviour himself uses it *John xiv. 1, 2. Ye believe in God, believe also in me; in my father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you.* Imposition and cheat are never made use of but upon some worldly design, or for present advantage; but here the whole scene of action is laid in the practice of innocence and simple virtue, and oft-times with tribulation, and the great reward at a great distance (as we are too apt to imagine) quite removed into another world.

Now we cannot suppose a God surrounded with all those attributes that must essentially belong unto him, and have been visibly exercised in making and governing the world, but we must likewise conclude that a religious worship and service must be paid him: and, what a kind of one should that be, but such as is most exactly agreeable to his divine nature? How should he be worshipped, being a spirit, but in spirit and truth? Should not the purity of his essence require a purity in religion? Should not his unity and incommunicableness

confine

confine all divine worship to his own Godhead? Should not his infinite justice and goodness call for the highest strains of virtue, piety, and righteousness? Should not he that sees not as man sees, but is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, expect a sincere, cordial and unfeigned obedience, and not be put off by hypocritical or outward performances, by a form of Godliness without the power, or by sacrifice without mercy?

Now, where are all these requisites of a service suitable to him to be found, but in the Christian religion? God indeed created man after his own likeness, but certainly in the regeneration he hath formed the Christian above all other men more exactly according to that image: the Christian religion being the only one in the world, that in its constitution evidently proves God to be its author, and that he took pattern from himself.

Nay, that faith which is required of us in the Gospel, and the present subject before us (though Christians have been upbraided with it) will farther maintain this argument, and the preference of our religion to all others. For surely that looks like the truest religion that commands an entire devotion of the whole man to God, and suffers no part, no faculty of the mind, no thought of the heart to stand out in opposition or rebellion: what humane laws can neither demand nor force, that is the right of true religion to require: and such must be the true faith required of us in the Gospel, which upon the conviction of the truth of all that is commanded, promised, and threatened in the holy scriptures, not only presently puts us upon action

on to mortify the lusts of the flesh, and bring it in subjection to the will of God, but also brings over our wrangling mutinous reason, corrects the exorbitant lusts of curiosity, and the opinionative wantonness of the mind; and so leaves no part of the man unconquered or with-holding submission. But this mighty influence of faith will more properly fall under the second general head, *viz.*

II. The great power of faith, &c. and that both super-natural and natural: of the

1st. The instance and occasion before us do give us a sufficient proof: a kind of an omnipotence is attributed to it in the verse before the text. Jesus said unto him, *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.* Great power, (1.) in an active sense, in some to enable them to work miracles themselves: in others, (2.) in a passive sense, to make them capable of having great miracles wrought upon them: if the disciples had not been a *faithless generation*, as Christ calls them, *ver.* 19. the miracle had been done before. And if the man too had not now believed in some measure according to the condition proposed, the dumb spirit might have continued in his son.

(1.) Then in an active sense, it bears down all difficulties and obstructions before it. *It can remove mountains*, and nothing shall be impossible to it says our Saviour *Matt.* xvii. 20. The disciples power of working miracles wholly depended upon this grace, and, whenever it failed, they became as other men. They afterwards kept up the same power by the same faith in Jesus, as appears *Acts*

iii. 16.

iii. 16. We have a prediction, (1 Cor. xiii.) that miracles shall cease, but if beside the prophesy we may be allowed to guess at a reason for that cessation, it may be grounded upon that general decay of faith in the Christain church. Who knows but were men endowed with the same graces the Apostles and some of the first Christians were, that might raise them up to as high a strain of true piety and devotion, they may become powerful in working mighty wonders? The cessation of prophesy in the *Jewish* church was caused by the general degeneracy of both priests and people into gross corruption in their faith and manners. And all the mighty herock acts of great and good men of old blazoned forth by the Apostle, *Heb. xi.* were done by the power of this faith: and the primitive champions of the Christian church were still more brave, and bore up themselves and their religion, by their invincible faith in a crucified Saviour, against all the power of earth and hell: and made good that saying of St. *John*, even in the most literal sense, that, *He that believeth that Jesus is the son of God, overcometh the world*, 1 John v. 5.

(2.) There is also a super-natural power of faith, in a passive sense: such was required of the person in the text, and most properly belonging to us, qualifying us for the extraordinary blessings of God: it was the condition that Christ justly required of every one that sought his cures; so necessary to the working of the miracle, that he did usually pronounce that the *faith* of the diseased had *made him whole*; so powerful, that the want of it did

did usually lay a restraint upon the power of the former or active faith. *Matt. xiii. 58.* it is said of Christ himself, that *he did not many mighty works there* (in his own country) *because of their unbelief*; which relation, *Mark vi. 5.* is set down in higher terms, *and he could do there no mighty work*; (*ἐκ ἠδύνατο*) as though the infidelity of the people had enfeebled his omnipotent power.

But now the enemies of our faith upon this doctrine have founded an objection; attributing the miracles of Christ and his Apostles to that strength of imagination (which goes by the name of faith) required in the patient; which they do say, doth naturally produce wonderful effects. But to answer in short, 1. It is more wonderful that imagination did never effect such mighty things before or since: there are none, or very few instances upon record of any miraculous cure or other extraordinary act wrought by it; at least there was never any continuance of such fanciful operations. 2. A strong imagination will admit of no doubting, but faith will; as in the text, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*, and yet the miracle was done; therefore faith in this case is only a conviction in the understanding of the power of God, and a submission to his will, together with a hope (not an absolute certainty) of enjoying the extraordinary benefit of that divine power and will: but imagination in their acceptance is nothing but a strong and unwarrantable presumption. 3. Christ and his Disciples did many signs and wonders where neither faith nor imagination was required, or could indeed be had: as in raising the dead, curing

curing at a distance, besides other miracles done upon subjects utterly incapable by nature of believing or conceiting. Yet it is but reasonable to conclude that rational men, who have understandings and wills, ought to bring in the consent of both to the performance of the miracles, and to the receiving that doctrine those miracles were designed to confirm. And this is the faith that is required in the patient. It is contrary to all the methods of God's dispensations, to stretch out his extraordinary providence to the benefit of an obstinate resisting unbeliever; as it is, to force his irresistible grace (as some ridiculously maintain he doth) upon such as resolve to persevere in sin, and never to have (if they can help it) to do with him or his laws.

But to proceed; such *still* is the privilege and happiness of faith even to a miracle, in all manner of comfort and consolation: all things are *now* possible to him that believeth: an universal cure of all our maladies, or what is as good, a patient spirit to bear them with joy and chearfulness. The miracles of faith shall never cease: a belief of God's power that he can, a full trust in his goodness that he will help and deliver, if he sees it convenient, together with a resolution of acquiescing in whatsoever he shall do, or not do for us, is, as it were, an obligation laid upon divine goodness and wisdom to take the best care of us, of which this faith makes him the sole judge. Can we think he will deceive one that hath put his whole trust and affiance in him? We think ourselves, that it is the highest unworthiness to wrong
a friend

a friend that hath resigned himself up wholly to our disposal, and we have a double obligation to deal faithfully and affectionately with those that have put entire confidence in us. This is one reason that faith is so comprehensive a duty, and even the whole of our religion; because it is an entire resignation of ourselves to God, not only to do his will, but also to submit in all things to his pleasure, upon the belief that he is infinitely powerful, wise, and good, both to do and chuse best for us.

It had been an under-valuing to Christ's miracles to have raised a scornful cripple, or to have opened the eyes of a proud pharisee, that should have derided or defied his power: he made the very devils themselves, before he cast them out, make a confession of their faith, falling down before him, and calling him *Jesus the son of God most high*, Luke viii. 28. And therefore, because the young man here, having a dumb spirit, could not confess in his own person, his father becomes a surety for him, and answers to the articles of his creed.

If we consult experience, what an affluence of good things falls in upon a faith and trust in God's goodness? Who hath ever found himself deceived by confiding in him, and resigning himself up to him? Have not his blessings more often exceeded our expectations? Have we not often been delivered in many cases that seemed desperate, by applying our selves to him? and, when neither we nor our best friends could contrive any way of escape, he hath succoured us to a miracle.

2dly, The

2dly, The efficacy of faith will further appear in that natural power (if I may be allowed to call it so) it exercises over our conversations. The miracles of faith, I say, are ceased, that is, as to those stupendous appearances that were made for the first confirmation of the Christian religion. Yet mighty things may be still done by it against the powers of lust and passion, the strong allurements of the world, and the machinations of Satan; if we did but truly believe in God, and that he hath commanded that we should resist these enemies, and for our victory will give us a crown of glory. Mortification is a transcendent work, and what we may call in some sense super-natural; yet no more than what we often times do upon the prospect of worldly advantages: and would be more easy to a sound faith in Christ Jesus, (*viz.*) that it was his practice and command; and that if we deny ourselves here, that is, quit our present satisfaction or gain for his service, we shall reign with him in infinite bliss and glory in the world to come.

For true faith must be such a full assent to all that is delivered to us in the Gospel, as must necessarily draw on a practice conformable: a full belief that both the promises and threats, the rewards and punishments therein contained shall certainly come to pass; and that therefore all the precepts to direct us toward the one, and divert us from the other, are indispensably obliging, as conditions appointed by God to be performed on our part, to make us capable of that salvation which Christ's blood hath purchased: which full conviction and assent of our reason and judgment (for the
best

best faith is no more) will naturally bring over our wills and affections to a ready obedience. I say *naturally*, that is, according to the course and order of natural motives, which are not of irresistible force; because men oft-times sin against nature, but then their guilt is the more heinous. This we see made good in matters of the world: for had any man that hath a desire to be rich, the prospect of a great estate before him, or any desirable reward offered him, which he believes he might have upon gentle and honest conditions; would he refuse or stand off, or did any man ever do so, without being thought mad? Nature it self prompts us, or rather lays some force upon us to accept of such offers. Nay, though those riches and treasures lie as far off as the *Indies*, yet the believing and desiring adventurer shall quit his home, and all that is beloved there, and run all the hazards of seas, pyrates and shipwrecks, to fetch off this worldly wealth from those distant regions: he hath a principle within him (as a holy prelate * expresses it upon the same point) strong enough to answer all objections, because he believes that riches are desirable, and by such means likely to be had. Or again; Can we suppose a man careful to preserve his life, and fearful of every accident that may endanger it, yet act so resolutely against the principles of nature, as to run himself violently upon the point of a sword which he sees directed against him, or into a pit of destruction before him, when he hath rational information given him of the certainty of these dangers?

* Bishop Taylor's Life of Christ, Part 2. Disc. 7. of Faith.

Nay,

Nay, we need only instance in probable advantages, and probable dangers of this nature: how careful and vigilant do we find all men in eagerly catching at the one, and solicitously avoiding the other, though neither prove real? Nature would prove as great an assistant in animating and impelling us to our duty, could we but thus far believe the greatness of our reward in obeying, and the eternal punishment of disobedience; could we look up unto Jesus as *the author and finisher of our faith, as the way, the truth, and the life*, by whom alone we have access to the father, and the promise of an everlasting inheritance; could we behold with the eye of faith the joys of heaven, as we do even a remote object of gain or advantage here below; could our apprehensions represent to us the flames of hell, or the groans of the damned, as our fancies oftentimes do the approach of a disease or some signal calamity, or as we are apt usually to forebode the coming of sad times or persecution: and in truth death and hell (which for want of faith we least fear) may be nearer than any other evil we are more afraid of. And this no doubt, after all voluminous enquiries, is that true, lively, justifying, saving faith: such an assent to all the truths of the Gospel upon the testimony of God conveyed to us by the most rational evidences, as shall immediately put us upon a practice conformable: such a belief in Christ, and trust in his merits, as shall forthwith set us upon the doing such good works as he indispensably requires, or otherwise had to no purpose left us a law consisting of precepts and commands for

practice, and not purely matters of faith and theory.

And therefore *Faith* in scripture is used in so comprehensive a sense, that *receiving the faith, embracing the faith, holding the faith*, and such like expressions, without any other additional requisite, do denote the whole duty of a Christian man; that is, as well a conformable practice to, as a full belief of those things delivered in the Gospel. Whatsoever passes under that name, whether historical, or any other kind of faith, it is either but opinion, or a guess at improbabilities, or amounts to no higher a persuasion than what we never withhold from common histories; which indeed may properly be called Belief, but cannot be of such power and efficacy as divine Faith, the subject of which is of as deep concern to us as eternal life and death.

As for the faith which is usually attributed to the devils, which is rather higher than all humane faith, and makes them *believe and tremble*, proceeding from a certain knowledge of God's power, and of the kingdom of Christ, by which theirs was so much impaired; there is no doubt, but of itself it might have been sufficient to have made up a true saving faith, were they but in a state of salvation, or had Christ took upon him the nature of Angels, whereby they might have been capacitated to receive the benefits of their faith. But an eternal and irreversibile sentence is passed against them; though they believe never so soundly, to what end should they conform in practice? Yet had any believer upon earth that portion of faith
that

that the devils have, and no more, he would fear and tremble to better purposes. What they do with a vengeance, he would do with reverence and Godly fear, even work out his own salvation. What is the aggravation of their torment, unhappily to believe and know so much, would raise him to the most joyful hope and prospect of happiness, and immediately set him upon the works of obedience, forasmuch as he hath reason to believe, that he is in a state of salvation, and not of desperate and remediless condemnation, as they are.

Therefore as, all Gospel-duties are comprehended under the name of Faith, because they are the necessary effects of it, (see *James ii. Rom. iv. Gal. iii.*) so all irregularities in practice do generally proceed from *infidelity*: and as we may properly call all vertuous and holy livers, sound believers; so in as true a sense all vitious and irreligious livers are no better than atheists and infidels. For the very same natural inclinations that direct us to chuse the good, or what we think so, and refuse the evil, in matters of this life, would upon a sound belief of all the truths delivered in holy scriptures likewise lead us, (that is, so long as we are in our wits, and have the use of common reason) to embrace the rewards therein proposed, and the means to obtain them, as the most delectable objects; and with all might and main decline the punishments therein threatened, and the ways that will bring them upon us, as the most calamitous evils. For atheism is at the bottom of all wickedness; and man is too great a coward to be vitious, and at the same time truly to believe a God, and

that particular revelation of his will which is the subject of our Christian faith.

Thus far of the nature, evidence, and power of faith, we are in the

III. Place to enquire into its imperfections, or that mixture of unbelief which unavoidably insinuates itself into the heart of the soundest believer.

Faith, though affording the highest assent matters so remote and distant are capable of, must yet give place to sense and demonstration: and we cannot but imagine, if the greatest believer upon earth had been an eye-witness of all those miracles and other great acts that were done to confirm our religion; or had a present view of the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell, but that he must necessarily thence receive a considerable addition to the strength of his faith: or could one as easily demonstrate all the truths and mysteries of the Gospel, as that the whole is greater than a part, all doubtings must needs be removed. But this would destroy the nature of faith, which ceases when it becomes vision or demonstration, and would divert the purpose of God, who best can try his servants by requiring of their faith. It is now that *we walk by faith, and not by sight*, as St. Paul distinguishes, 2 Cor. v. 7. who himself had many visions; and 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10. 12. he acknowledges, that now we *know but in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*. And now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: that is, our faith shall then be cleared of all unbelief, and pass into

into vision. And no doubt that shall be one eminent degree of our happiness in the world to come, that our knowledge shall be completed, all distrust shall be done away, and uneasy curiosity shall no longer disturb us with doubtful enquiries.

Faith indeed would cease to be a virtue, and would be very unworthy of those high rewards that are annexed to it, if believers should ever be able to arrive at that height of certainty as to make them proof against all the least measure of unbelief. *Thomas* had but little thanks for his faith, when it must first pass through his senses: but the blessing is pronounced upon those that *have not seen, and yet believe*. It is impossible not to believe, when we see; and we are not beholden to any man that hath his senses about him, for granting, that fire is hot, or, that the whole is greater than a part.

Now this mixture of unbelief hath two origines.

1. Our own distrusting natures: and
2. The mysterious nature of the objects of our faith.

1. Our own distrusting natures.

We are apt to question whatsoever all our senses are not satisfied in: for taking those to be the inlets of all true knowledge (whether we are right or wrong in that way of judging) we distrust our intelligence, if we have it not from them. *Except I shall see in his hands, says the distrusting disciple, the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe,* (John xx. 25.) resolute against

all conviction, but what should satisfy every one of his senses: for he would not believe his eyes alone which were but a single evidence. Nay, though Christ himself and his fellow disciples should preach to him, that the Lord was risen: yet all should not make him believe, but *digito monstrari*, he must have the most sensible or feeling demonstration, before he could be raised to that rapturous acknowledgment of the sublime mystery expressed in those words, *My Lord, and my God!* And then his faith came up to a full consistency, in words of joy and extacy, as plainly confessing the divinity of his Lord, as the certainty of his resurrection.

And it is a hard task to raise our faith to a full persuasion; we must have actual proofs and witnesses for every truth before we let it pass the rigid tribunal of our own private judgments. We must have a sign from heaven, or else we will not admit so much as a beneficial doctrine, though already confirmed by mighty signs and wonders.

God must do his miracles over again, or we will not believe him. The *Jews* usually lost their faith, and were ever and anon starting into infidelity, if one miracle did not follow close upon another. The rich man must needs have *Abraham* send one on purpose from the dead to convince his brethren of the future estate of the wicked.

In our own wanton age it gives the reputation of wit and parts to be distrustful and sceptical, and looks like solid judgment and reason (as some fools fancy) to question every truth, and to examine curiously, and descant most upon the plain-
est

est things. Ingenious atheism is to them a preservative or antidote against credulity and superstition: which affected singularity is one of the greatest instances of pride and rebellion against God, since the Angels fell; too manifestly prevailing amongst our modern *Demagogues*, who seem to take a great deal of pains to hand us out of superstition and idolatry; but unluckily lead us into atheism and a general disregard of religion.

But to return; Though to require such a sensible, or indeed very sensual knowledge of divine truths, be highly brutish and unreasonable, contrary to the nature of faith, and the nature of its objects; a confining all knowledge to our own times, or within the reach of our own senses; a presumptuous expecting from God a particular miracle to convince every single obstinate sinner; which would interrupt the course of nature, and soon make that super-natural power too contemned, and its evidence slighted. For are there not standing miracles in the world? The matter and motion of the celestial bodies, the flux and reflux of the sea, the virtues of the magnet, and innumerable other mysteries of nature are all amazing and astonishing; only their constancy and visible continuance makes them disregarded, and pass into the common order of providence; and so indeed would all other miracles if they should be kept up from age to age, or performed as oft as incredulous men call for them. *If they will not hear Moses nor the Prophets, no, nor Christ nor his Apostles besides; because they did not see their persons nor miracles; neither will they believe,*

though one should rise from the dead ; because it is not to be doubted, but they will in time by the same spirit of incredulity find out reasons, sufficient to do their own business, even to elude the truth and testimony of such visions :---I say, notwithstanding the brutishness of expecting such an evidence, yet with humility and patience we must all confess, that faith cannot ever attain to such a certitude as to clear the believer of all the least mixture of unbelief, so long as we carry flesh and blood about us ; which will never entertain such sublime revelations, and on the same score quit present satisfactions ; for flesh and blood hath not revealed these mysteries, nor can comprehend them.

Thus far our unbelief is cherished by our sensitive faculties, but our reason too will come in with an objection, and that

2. From the mysterious nature of some divine truths. This was an occasion of offence to many pretenders to reason, and kept the philosophers out of the church for some time, because they could not bring down divinity to the level of their own principles, and thought themselves too wise to be captivated by the foolishness of preaching. It caused doubtings in the very Disciples, as in the chapter of my text : after the transfiguration, Christ charged them, that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the son of man were *risen from the dead* : and they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean, *ver.* 9, 10. and so of the passion, *ver.* 31. 32. A most stupendous mystery ! that the son of God, the
Messias,

Messias, their king, should be brought under the power of a violent death : and still more wonderful and astonishing, that he should die for the sins of that world, who were his executioners ! For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, *The son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and after that he shall rise the third day :* but they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask. And indeed the disciples seemed to be utterly ignorant of those doctrines, being too hard for them, till Christ gave an actual proof by rising from the dead, and shewing himself to them ; *For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise from the dead,* John xx. 9.

Photius relates that some of the philosophers that became Christians, received this article of the *Resurrection*, the very last into their belief, as thinking it contrary to those principles of philosophy which they had imbibed : nay, reckoning it amongst the contradictions or impossibilities of nature. But surely it cannot be such to those that believe the creation of the world out of nothing, which, no doubt, is a more difficult work than raising a body out of a pre-existent matter. He says too, that *Synesius*, for his excellent endowments, was chosen a Bishop * by the orthodox themselves before he had subscribed to its truth ; hoping he would in time come over, as it afterwards came to pass ; though in the mean while his wisdom and morals, and not dividing upon it, were thought sufficient to expiate for a modest scruple even in so great a point. Thus far believing

* Of Ptolemais, An. Christi 410.

ving hath been difficult, and doubting hath been allowed of: it is obstinacy makes the heresy, when by a stiff adherence to an old dogma, or philosophick position, men shall resolutely decline all farther enquiry and information. St. *Theophilus*, * long before *Synesius*, that good bishop of *Antioch*, an acute philosopher, retained a reluctance for some time to the same mysterious article; but not indulging the scruple, and “ frequently reflecting upon the many shadows of a resurrection, which God had impressed upon the course of nature, and the standing Phænomena of divine providence, he conquered this objection, especially after he had conversed with, and embraced the holy volumes wherein these things were so positively declared and determined ” †.

We have nothing to do now with the numerous hereticks against the mysteries of religion, or to engage in their confutation. It will be sufficient to instance only in the *Socinians*, who are the *Coryphæi* of them all, and now infest the Christian churches; acknowledging Christ Jesus very little more than do the *Mahometans*. They pretend to have refined the doctrines of their predecessors the *Arians*, and it is with a vengeance; for they have quite out-stripped them in their desperate and impious positions. They have thrown all mysterious articles out of their Creed, because untractable to their reason, and indeed upon the same account should throw as many things out of the world, which

* Anno Christi 168.

† Vid. Dr. *Cave's* Life of St. *Theophilus*.

which are the daily objects of sense, but whose natures, motions, and vertues they can as little, or to as little purpose explicate, as the incomprehensible Trinity : and by the way too they put their reason more to the stress, and upon the rack, and in fact raise more difficulties, and create more mysteries in endeavouring to elude the truth of those mysterious articles, than they would be put upon should they acknowledge them : as is visible in their torturing of particles, and other shifts, to a contrary signification, when the main words of the text they cannot disprove ; as also in all their wild and forced interpretations of those places of scripture, (particularly the first chapter of *St. John*, and the epistle to the *Hebrews*) from whence the divinity and satisfaction of the son of God are plainly maintained or deduced. For the *Socinians* have frequently acknowledged, that the scripture, according to the natural and genuine acceptation of its words, doth fairly enough imply the two fore-mentioned doctrines ; but their main plea is, they cannot reconcile them to their reason ; and so the most forced and foreign interpretation is rather to be embraced ; but certainly they themselves had made fairer riddance in their work, if they had exploded the whole authority, and downright denied the scripture canon.

For though the mysteries of our religion, as to a scientifick explication, cannot be comprehended by humane reason ; yet we have one general reason or argument that infallibly infers the truth of them ; which all must own, who acknowledge the truth of the scriptures. Because we have the supreme

preme authority of heaven and earth, which being infinitely good cannot deceive, and infinitely knowing cannot be deceived, to avouch our belief; and we have the most infallible evidences, that either the subject is capable of, or we of receiving, to warrant the delivery of these divine truths (howsoever mysterious) from that supreme infallible authority. Now we must transgress the rules of reason in the highest degree, if we distrust these evidences (as I have proved already) and, if not, we must be downright absurd and brutish in giving greater credit to reason than to that divine authority; if we disbelieve such mysterious articles, because we cannot give a rational explicit account of their nature: so long as they are no ways contradictory to our reason, it is no wonder such sublime matters should lie out of its reach. And then we may as reasonably question the very being of a God, upon that reason, because our finite understandings are not sufficient to comprehend him. This would be to make a God of reason, and boldly to confine infinite knowledge within the narrow sphere of our own capacities; to put it even out of the power of the Almighty to utter deeper truths than his own shallow creatures are able to understand; whereas *it is the glory of God to conceal a thing*, says the wise Man, *Prov. xxv. 2.* God himself, who is a spirit, and will be worshipped in spirit and truth, is likewise incomprehensible, and will not allow the religion of his own institution to be confined to the model of our own prescriptions; but it must bear a like relation, *i. e.* to his incomprehensible

henfible nature and effence. He is the great end and object of all our worship; and himfelf the fountain and profoundeft of all mysteries: and though natural reafon leads us, nay, almoft compels us to acknowledge his being, yet prefently we are left at a lofs, and we can go no further.

Θεὸν νοῆσαι μὲν ἐστὶ χάλειπον, φράσαι δὲ ἀδύνατον, fays the father *: our conceptions can hardly reach him, and our language can never describe him. *Clouds and darknefs are round about him; but righteousness and judgment* (where our concern lies moft) *are the habitation of his throne.*

But it will be time to fum up all with fome further remedies againft this taint of incredulity that infects the foundeft faith. *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.*

IV. Laftly, We are to propofe fome means for the increafing and ftrengthening our faith, or clearing it (as much as is poffible) of that mixture of unbelief, and fo raifing it the higheft it will bear towards a certainty; which means are either natural or fuper-natural.

1. The natural or humane means are fuch as may be faid to be within our own power, and with divine concurrence will be very prevailing. St. Paul tells us, *Rom. x. 17. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*; be fure then to attend constantly upon that duty, fomewhat may fall from the preacher's mouth that may happily remove that fcruple and doubt that before had fhattered and diftled our faith. Under this

* Justin. Mart. ex Herm. Trismegist.

this we must comprehend diligent reading and searching the scriptures, for in them we may with reason think we have eternal life. Philosophers of old that retained a prejudice for a long time against those sacred writings, at last by frequent reading and studying of them, confessed themselves convinced and brought over, by that self-evidence they observed in them; and after became the most famous fathers of the church, as also the greatest defenders of the authority and transcendent excellency of that sacred volume.

This duty we must second with all the possible improvement of our natural reason; were but that cleared of prejudices, it would direct and forward us a great part of our way: we will not give ourselves time to consider, and argue the case freely in so great a concern. From the very first notion and apprehension of a God (whose being it is almost impossible for us not to believe) by a plain and easy tract of reason may we deduce the truth of the Christian religion, as hath already been sufficiently proved; and the opinion of the *Deists*, though thought to be refined from atheism, is most absurd; for if there be a God, a service and worship must be proper and acceptable to him from his creatures that have rational and immortal souls: now such a service or homage suitable to his nature he never yet had in any age, or in any part of the world, unless from the Christian.

If such reasonings cannot work upon us, but unbelief will still have its course; for the last trial, let us but consider this one maxim that seldom fails to rule us in matters of the world, and one

one would think of itself should be sufficient to persuade us to a good life, though we did not believe so thoroughly as we ought to do, *viz.* That it is good to be sure, and the wisest course ever to prevent the worst. And therefore a learned and rational Divine * of our church hath called faith a spiritual prudence: for though faith be properly an act of the understanding, and thence influences the will and affections to a conformity to what is believed: yet as the foundation of atheism is laid in the will, the man first wisheth that there were no God, and then sets himself to prove the position; so the will may be most useful and assisting in the first rise of faith; especially when with resolution we set our selves seriously to consider of those things which may possibly so deeply concern us, and purposely frame and bend our minds to embrace those doctrines, and live according to them, which will one day stand us in so much stead, if true, and if not, do us no harm.

And now if it becomes so great an act of prudence to believe, how imprudent, or indeed mad is the venture of those great wits that have published laborious treatises either against, or in detraction from those scriptures which possibly may be true! and if not, they have only the empty reputation of singular wits and rational judgments (as they fancy) above the common rank of mankind that have hitherto been led by credulous superstition; and this same too they have from the worst of mankind, and how long I pray you is it like to last, though their opinion prove truest, so long

* Mr. Chillingworth, Sermon II.

long as all according to them perishes with this life? But then if there should chance to be a day of judgment, and a hell for the wicked; what torment (think ye) can be commensurate to the crime of those rational villains, who by their pretended wit and parts have perhaps conducted many legions of disciples (that affect the same vanity and singularity) to endless and the most exquisite punishment?

He that knows thunder and lightening to be the effect of natural causes, yet keeps in, or startles at it: he that most laughs at the relations of ghosts and apparitions, yet is as apt to shiver in the dark at a shadow, or any accidental unthought-of motion, as any one that is more credulous. A doubting or a shivering faith one would think may be enough to make us look about us, and to direct us in the securest course.

Nay, supposing it but a probability, or somewhat less than a probability, that we had the more persuasive reasons to disbelieve the promised rewards and threatened judgments of the world to come, would it not be the greatest stupidity, in a matter of such everlasting concern, not to follow the safest way, where there can be no danger, should there be no relief? For if virtue be never rewarded in the world to come, it will be certain to escape punishment, and to spend so much time, as that of a short (the longest) life in the practice of it, can be no great loss. But sin or immorality can never expect the reward of happiness; and if eternal torments may but probably be its portion, and our souls but probably immortal, it is argument

gument sufficient to terrify us (were we not perversely bent upon our own ruin) from a continuance in its practice.

Thus, 1. Diligent and unprejudiced search and enquiry into the records of revelation. 2. Serious and impartial consideration of the whole matter; that is, freely and soberly reasoning and arguing the case with our selves. And, 3. A virtuous life, which will both encourage us, and give us leisure to think and look about us; will soon fix our tremulous faith, and bring it to such a solid consistency, as comes the nearest a certainty, that believers by their own endeavours can possibly attain to. This last I must further urge as a requisite of absolute necessity, and but a fair pre-engagement, that we should live as rational and moral men, or else we cannot be qualified to judge and determine in such matters, though of so deep concern to us. For if our lusts be engaged and made in with before-hand, and a party be raised amongst our sensual appetites and inclinations, our rational or intellectual faculties will never be allowed a free debate, but always silenced and over-powered. To gratify our lusts is downright bribery in this case, and the carnal mob within us must necessarily bear down the single vote of the understanding: a vitious life is the greatest corruption in every sense, and will always beget the foulest proceedings: it is impossible to build up our faith in the confusion of lusts: St. Paul therefore, (2 *Thess.* ii. 12.) declares the great fundamental of infidelity in the last times; *They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* Wick-

ed men prosecute their vicious practices as an interest of great concern, and before will so well guard them, as not to suffer the assaults or incroachments of a pious, tho' most rational faith.

Thus it is apparent, that moral goodness is the surest foundation of faith; and practice in this sense hath the precedence to believing. When our faith is once raised, it will be of mighty power and influence to sway us in our conversations, and to put us upon more transcendent acts of virtue and piety; but in order to this, let us begin right; that is, as creatures that have reason and understandings, and are not made like unto the beasts that have none: let us first engage ourselves in moral, virtuous living, which is both congruous to our well-being in this world, and will most certainly put us upon making the best security for the next. And yet still after all we must seek for further help; and that

2. From divine grace and assistance; the holy spirit of God, confirming our minds with a higher degree of certainty, than the external motives of credibility can raise us to: for faith is begun by reason, and is the *gift of God*, when completed by his holy spirit; the foundation must first be laid in the rational grounds of believing, which are antecedent to divine illumination: therefore in all the books of the New Testament, says *Cassander*, *Spiritus sanctus ponitur post fidem*. "The holy Spirit comes after faith"; and the same truth is maintained by *Grotius* § on the same subject: 'What is begun and first received upon rational

* *Cassand. consult. Artic. 5.*
Art. 5. Et Ver. pro pace Art. 5.

§ *Grot. Cont. Rivet. Animad.*

onal motives of credibility, is increased, sealed, and made active by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, graciously enlivening our faith, and succouring it, as it were, with new revelation, removing the vail, and making a plainer discovery of the truth'. Did not God by a sovereign providential care protect us; our lives by many casualties would sooner come to a period; and did not his assisting and strengthening grace support and keep up our faith, it would quickly degenerate into a total infidelity.

Let us not then cherish doubts and scruples, and please our selves with a vain-affected singularity in discovering nice objections, and raising novel queries against an old and safe religion: but let us make earnest application to God by prayer, that he would increase our faith, and help our unbelief, that he would still give us clearer evidences to, and make deeper impressions upon our understandings. Unbelief, like the dumb spirit in the chapter of the text, *is not cast out but by prayer and fasting*, by a constant adding our selves to a serious, considering, devout life, and by mortifying our prejudices and sensual curiosity.

Now our greatest encouragement of all is, that God never will deny us the assistance of his grace and holy spirit, if we shall endeavour to improve our faith first by all humane or rational means, and then with our humble confessor in the text, lay open our distrustful thoughts before him, and supplicate for his pardon and redress: and sure with all these helps and assistances we shall have conduct sufficient to guide us through this darkness

ness and shadow of death, into his most marvellous light, even everlasting life; where our faith shall be changed into a glorious vision, and our hope into a blessed fruition. *Amen.*

SERMON II.

OF HAPPINESS.

LUKE XII. 15.

—*For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

THE *Jews* were strongly possessed with two opinions, which made them proof against the reception of any *Messias* that should maintain the contrary. The one,

1. That their law, even with all the ceremonies thereof, was perpetually obliging, and never to be abolished. The other,

2. That the promises thereunto annexed were still to be temporal, and in order to that, the *Messias* they now expected should raise their fortunes, even upon earth, to a higher pitch than ever they had been, under any of their former governours or prophets.

To

To dispossess them of these two opinions, or rather fundamental articles of their faith (taught them by their wisemen, and so well agreeing with their carnal principles) was a very difficult task, and indeed proved too hard for our Saviour himself: (For it was not consistent with his kingdom of faith and righteousness, proposed to the free reason and will of men, to make use of his absolute dominion, or the force of his irresistible grace;) although his working such miracles, his preaching so miraculously (as the oracles of God), his living up to the highest rules of sanctity and undesigned virtue, one would think were irresistible proofs that he came forth from God; and that therefore, whatsoever alterations or reformatations he designed amongst them, they must necessarily be of divine authority.

Now to check their ambition, he declared to them that *his kingdom was not of this world*, (John xviii. 36. Matt. xx. 21. 23. Luke xii. 14.) He would not, that is, it was contrary to his design to dispose of preferments, either on his right-hand, or on his left, to controul the powers of the world, or interfere with secular affairs under this heavenly government; and therefore disclaimed all temporal power and jurisdiction.

But to restrain their more sordid humour of avarice, and quite cut off their expectations as to that old carnal end of serving God; he would scarce admit them the practice of good husbandry; *Lay not up for your selves treasures upon earth: take no thought for your life*, not so much as for necessaries, *food, and raiment*; Matt. vi. 19.

25---31. And in the verse of the text doubles this caution, *Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

A doctrine truly founded both on reason and religion; the former informs us plainly enough, that our life, our true life doth not (cannot) consist in the things of this life; for then virtue will ever have but little, and sometimes no reward: and religion gives us greater assurance, that our immortal natures were designed for better purposes, and, by prescribing a better way of living, hath put us in a better road of happiness. And as the duration of this life can bear no proportion to eternity, so in comparison to that everlasting felicity promised in the Gospel, all the enjoyments of this life (how much more when blended with so many evils) make up but a state of drudgery and slavery, which our wise creator hath ordained for us as a fit passage to higher advancement.

This is not mere contemplation, but the standing conclusion, not only of every good Christian, but also every wise and considering moralist, *viz.* That our life, the true end of our life and being, consisteth not in the abundance of those things we possess or enjoy; as will be further illustrated under these following heads.

I. The proposition itself; man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,

II. We

II. We are to discover wherein man's life consisteth; if not in the things of this life.

III. Means and directions proposed, how to fix and settle our selves in order to any real and solid contentment, or happiness, that is attainable upon earth; since a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

I. First, we are to make good the proposition itself, That a man's *life* consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, nor in any enjoyments thereunto belonging.

The word Life in most places of scripture, especially of the New Testament, is to be interpreted in the better or superior sense, (excepting some few places where it is taken for our breath or animal life) being mostly the same with happiness, or that which is the main end of our life; because felicity (of some sort or other) is that which all men do naturally strive after, and our own best reason leads us towards.

Both acceptations of the word are join'd together *Matt. xvi. 25.* and in other places of the same import, *Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it*; where *life* in the latter sense is the proper and valuable life to be saved or lost: and by this and innumerable other places, it is plain, the writers of the New Testament used the word in the sublimer sense: so St. Paul follows the notion, *Col. iii. 3.*

Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. Nay, it is as old as *Adam*, and then made good in matter of fact, when that fatal extensive curse was denounced, *Morte morieris*; thou shalt die the death, that is, *mortaliseris**, thou shalt live in a state of death: true life shall be taken away, and only the shadow remain, and that soon to vanish into the shadow of death: so that proper life (not the shadow, but the substance) is that which is the end of our life, or of our being sent into the world; which *Plotinus* calls Ἀληθὴς Ζωή, the true life, not that which is common to us with beasts: and the *Epicureans* call it γαλήνη τῆ βίῃ, the tranquillity and ease of life, without disturbance from superstition or causeless fears, as they meant it.

Euripides † calls it into question, and thought it might be a subject of dispute, whether the life we breathe be a life or no: or whether that which we call death be not as truly life: a paradox indeed! but intimating that our life is made up of so many deadly evils, and sad catastrophe's, that it deserves not that name.

Now to prove this to our own satisfaction, that our life consisteth not in the best things that we possess or enjoy, we will appeal to the best evidences, viz. to the testimony of (1.) Scripture, (2.) Reason, and (3.) Common Experience.

(1.) The proof of this from particular places of scripture would be too large, and indeed needless; it

* Translat. Symachi, as St. *Hierome* affirms.

† Τίς δ' οὔτεν ἐὶ ζῆν τῆ θ' ὁ κέκληται θάνατον τὸ ζῆν δὲ θνήσκειν ἔστ. Plat. Gorg. ex Eurip.

it is manifest enough from the tenour of the whole. The royal preacher long ago contemplating *all the works that were done under the sun*, found them to be nothing but *vanity and vexation of spirit*: and both those royal prophets, father and son, men experienced in the best and highest things of the world, through their whole writings have sufficiently discovered the utter insufficiency of all things, beside wisdom or religion, to make up a happy life.

It is yet more clearly manifest from the very design of the Gospel; every precept and example directing us towards more sublime objects; and the very end of Christ's coming being to cast a dis-esteem upon all things here below, to bring glad tidings of salvation, and make better offers of happiness, than the world had yet ever heard of.

And certainly if happiness be to be had only upon earth, and in earthly things, Christians above all others are the farthest removed from it. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ* (says St. Paul 1 Cor. xv. 19.) *we are of all men most miserable*, Their parts and industry might have made them as great sharers in the profits and enjoyments of the world as other men; but instead of these they rather chose to embrace all the difficulties of the cross upon the comfortable hopes of a more glorious life; indeed the more proper and noble prize for rational and immortal souls; which hopes founded then upon a demonstrable evidence of faith gave too the best happiness and truest contentment upon earth, both in prospect, and as an earnest of that which should be completed and made

made eternal: and undoubtedly it is the greatest cowardice and improvidence in mortals, not to forego such mixt and temporary enjoyments, and chearfully encounter any evils, even upon the probable expectations of so vast a reward as an everlasting crown of glory and blessedness.

The philosophers, we are told, and even about that time of our Saviour's coming into the flesh, were in zealous pursuit and enquiry after that which could be denominated a real happiness, or chief * good. And when they could never produce an instance of any one person that could fill up the character of a happy man, they fell to notion and imagination,

Some were for settling this chief good in the dry practice of moral virtues, without the addition of any eternal prosperity, or the expectation of a reward: *Ipsa sui virtus † pretium sibi*, the cold principle of the *Stoicks*, that virtue alone could purchase this happiness; and so pretended it might be attained under acute pains or diseases, under a fit of the stone, or the gout, or upon the rack: though a man were shut up in *Phalaris's* bull, or bruised and brayed in *Nicocreon's* mortar: his great mind may be happy, free, and undisturbed.

Some again fixed this happiness upon divine Ideas ||; in the contemplation of the first good or first mind, which was God; and so could not be molested

* Summum bonum: 'Ευδαιμονία Μακαρισμός εὐτυχία, quam Aristoteles interpretatur 'Ευζωίαν καὶ εὐπραγίαν.

† Quæris enim aliquid supra summum, interrogas quid petam extra virtutem ipsam; nihil enim habet melius, pretium sui est. *Seneca de Vitâ Beatâ. cap. 9.*

|| Alcín. de Doctr. Plat.

molested by external evils; which indeed comes near the blessedness we believe the Saints shall enjoy in heaven, but is too fine and sublime to be attained upon earth, at least without a Christ and a Comforter. Others to dress up this bird of paradise or happiness, could not choose but borrow fine feathers from the gaieties of the world: and thought their chief good would be too naked and imperfect, if it went without the honours, riches, and pleasures of this life: but this was sensual and failing too, bringing more disturbances than relief to the soul: *Virtus censum non requirit, nudo homine contenta est*: if virtue cannot effect it in a naked man, the greatest estate can never furnish him out for happiness, though nothing be wanting that can be bought for money.

According to *Varro's* calculation about the question of man's chief felicity, there were no less than two hundred and eighty distinct opinions or sects; which niceness of division shews, that it was matter of project and speculation, and never made good in matter of fact: and although the habits and practice * of morality came nearest the point, as being of the very essence of true happiness; yet the *Stoicks* often-times belied their profession, and were commonly as great hypocrites in their morality, as ever the *Pharisees* were in their religion: the objection was made against *Seneca* † himself, and his predecessors too, *Plato*, *Epicurus*, and *Zeno*;

* *Actio secundum virtutem.*

† *Aliter loqueris, aliter vivis: hoc Platoni obiectum est, cum Epicuro, obiectum Zenoni; omnes enim ipsi dicebant, non quemadmodum ipsi viverent, sed quemadmodum vivendum est; and of himself, de virtute, non de me loquor. Seneca de Vit. Beat. cap. 18.*

Zeno ; and it was confessed they could not come up to that height of practice as was projected in theory, and therefore fell short so many degrees of true happiness.

Thus far of speculative felicity, but never reduced to practice ; whilst out of the land of *Judah* arises one (more than man or common philosopher) that openly declares and offers to the world the true happiness so much sought after ; silenced all the wisemen, all the men of notion and philosophy, and establishes a kingdom, wherein this chief good or felicity might be made every man's property.

And truly we cannot more fully express the great end of our Saviour's coming into the world (besides that most transcendent one of dying for the sins of the world) than by saying it was his grand design, by his precepts and example, to raise his followers to that most divinely philosophical disposition, and most happy temper of mind made good too in all virtuous practice ; that they might with joy overlook or disregard all the evils of this life, and with real pleasure and chearful zeal press on toward that completion of happiness, in the next world, which he had purchased for them with his blood : so that after all our enquiries, such as these are the only instances of happy men that ever were in the world ; and the grand *arcanum* of felicity is only to be discovered in the Christian religion ; all the philosophers having been but mere empyricks both in the practice of virtue, and in finding out the great secret of a happy life.

(2.) In

(2.) In the next place then we are to prove by the verdict of Reason, That our conformity to the example and laws of Christ, our faith and trust in the benefits of his death and passion, our assistances from the divine spirit, our comfortable hopes in his promises, and the other advantages of the Gospel, can alone make up the happy estate of man; that is, in a word, there can be no happiness in this life, but from the Christian religion.

(1st. Positively; herein alone our life consisteth.

(2^{dly}. Negatively; it is impossible it should consist in any thing beside.

(1st. Positively; herein alone our life consisteth.

Our reason informs us, and it is granted by all men, that there is a natural tendency in every man to something that is happy: but most men are misguided by their passions or lusts, or are carried away by the vain enticements of the world, and the temptations of satan, and so often fall upon destruction rather than true happiness: and those few that are more choice and industrious in their pursuit, yet when they have obtained the things they aimed at, they easily find themselves as far distant from true happiness, as if they had quite missed the mark.

Now, of this natural and so general tendency, and pressing towards some sort of happiness, the same reason informs us, that God must be the author, who is the author of our beings. It is unreasonable then to think, that God would have ever endowed men with that natural propensity and strong inclination to a happy estate, but that there is such a one, which is the end of our lives, and

and is within the possible reach of all men. For otherwise men had been sent into the world to suffer the torment the poets feign that gaping sinner doth in hell, with earnest faculties and outstretched appetites, reaching and catching at that which bobs away and flies from them.

The same Reason again will still inform us, That this happiness must be sought in our religion; the Christian religion of God's own appointment, which he appointed to fix the desires of men, and to make them happy, if they please.

1.) First then this is the happiness, because it is universal, as is the tendency and inclination; it is dilated and tendered to all men; it is not confined to the rich and honourable, to the philosopher or wise man of the world, but is set within the compass and reach of the lowest and most inconsiderable mortal: the wise, the rich, the mighty stood no fairer for it than the meanest beggar; nay, the Apostle tells us, (1 Cor. i. 26.) *Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called:* not but that there was an equal call and offer made to all, but they most commonly choose another road and way of happiness, and are apt to take up with the little advances towards it that lie next in their way.

So that thus the best dispensations of providence are fair and equal; the mighty by their advantages of wealth and honour could not make better interest in this affair, than the low and humble; the cunning and subtiler had not greater dexterity in this attainment, than the simple and innocent.

Nay,

Nay, so fair and universal is the tender of this so great happiness, that in whatsoever condition or circumstances God hath placed any man, he is equally capacitated for his grace, is enabled thereby to perform the duties required of him in his station, and by the mercies then of Christ Jesus hath as good a right to, and as easy an attainment of everlasting bliss, as he that hath the best external advantages, the greatest opportunities and leisure; and therefore stands as fair for this happiness.

2.) This must be the chief good or felicity in which our life consisteth, because it is satisfactory, cannot be disturbed, nor taken from us. It fills the mind, and the desires; brings peace, and the most pleasing tranquillity to the soul and conscience. It suffers not the senses and appetites to wander abroad to find out new objects, and as many troubles, but gives full content at home within itself. It satisfies without being beholden to the world, and supplies the man with joy and comfort under the greatest outward wants and distresses; gives him courage and cheerfulness under the oppression of a cruel tyrant, or the hand of a bloody executioner. Because his happiness, that is, his religion, which is the source and fountain of it, cannot be destroyed or lessened, but may be advanced and made more triumphant, by persecution. It makes him walk unconcerned in a fiery furnace, and enter the flames with as great triumph as *Elijah* his fiery chariot: and this is not mere description or notion, but hath been made good in matter of fact from the beginning of
of

of the world by thousands and ten thousands of those that have been devotees to the true religion.

3.) This must be the happiness, because hereby are solved all those objections that are usually raised by the enemies of religion against divine providence, which is very often questioned, and hath made some to slip, and others quite to fall, by reason of the seeming inequality in the ordering and disposing of all things here below. The reason and answer is plain; The offer of God's best and choicest blessings, or such as deserve that name, is equal, and they are fairly laid within the reach of all his rational creatures; and those of this world (about which there is so much stir and contest) are but as it were mere accidental things, small and inconsiderable circumstances, that do not at all contribute to the making up of a happy man; and so no more infringe the regularity, or interrupt the method of divine providence, than those many hills and vallies that are up and down upon the surface of the earth, destroy the round and circular figure of that orb.

Since then it is not the rule of divine providence, to confer upon every one his temporal blessings, according to the measure of their deservings; it must be concluded, because he is still a just God, that he doth not esteem them (and they really are not) the certain tokens of his good-will and pleasure, or the real things that will make his creatures happy; that he did not make man for their enjoyment, or intend his life should consist in them; but sent him into the world altogether in order to a better estate, an eternal settlement, toward the attainment

attainment of which he hath endowed him with faculties that should move him, and incite him to higher things, so that he might not acquiesce in the things of this life. And to this natural power and inclination too (because it is attended with much infirmity) God hath promised the assistance of his divine grace and holy Spirit; which supernatural help being wanting to the moral or stoical pretender to happiness, as also the assurance of everlasting bliss after death, it was impossible they should ever raise the practice of virtue to that height, as to make themselves completely happy. Thus far positively.

(2. *Secondly*, Negatively; our life cannot consist in any thing beside, and that will be made plain by running back the former reasons.

First, Not in the things of this life; because they can in no wise answer that universal tendency there is in mankind to something that is happy, of which God is the author, and he hath made nothing in vain: for some are under irresistible circumstances of poverty, and a mean condition, yet have a mind to be happy, and do still retain a capacity for future and everlasting blessings; many indeed are for ever deprived of any thing that is joyful here, but are not barred the favour of God, or hopes of an eternal kingdom, unless they please.

Secondly, Not in the things of this life; for then nothing but sophistry can make up the justice of God's providence, who oftentimes denies prosperity and length of days to the most virtuous li-
vers, and confines the choicest things of this
E world

world (which must make up this happiness, if there be any such) to the number of a very few, and those signalized from the rest by no natural or acquired qualifications.

Thirdly, Because here is no satisfaction, nor is the best estate exempted from innumerable infelicities, but under the greatest enjoyments of this life we are in some degree miserable; and this will abundantly appear under the third *Testimony*. viz.

(3.) If we appeal to our own Experience, we may be easily satisfy'd that the life of man never consisted in the abundance of his possessions or enjoyments.

Now to be happy, is to be in such a condition, wherein we cannot be said to want any thing, nor to be tormented with the uneasy desires of more or better; that is, either to possess and enjoy all things, or else so many good things, that there shall remain no longing after variety or addition, and no disturbing fears of future evil.

Tell me the man then, how well soever set up for the world, that can pretend to such a complete enjoyment, or in the place of it, a full contentment, unless he borrows it from his religion.

Is it not usual with us (I am confident there is scarce any one amongst us but hath experienced it at some time or other, or in some relation or other) in whatsoever condition we are, still to be desirous of an addition or some alterations? That if God would be pleased to put us in such or such a way of living, that then our hearts would be at ease, and we should not covet, nor care for any man's greater abundance. Well! God has comply'd with this moderate request, and raised us to the condition

condition we pretended would terminate our desires: but now let us judge ourselves, have we not been quite as eager in compassing more? Has the wished supply so much as moderated our desires? Or in the least taken off the edge of our appetites?

Again, after this: if he would give us enough to keep even with the world, maintain our families, and breed up our children in some handsome manner, that then we would take no farther care, nor desire more in this world: when it pleases God to answer also these our reasonable desires; are we not quite as earnest for something to lay up against unseen accidents, for a stock or fund that may secure us in distress? Something too to leave these poor children, that they might not be put to their shifts, and thrown upon the wide world? And when it once comes to this, there is no bottom nor measure of our desires; and no man lives to compass so much as he would fain leave behind him.

Certainly then this is not happiness to be in a constant state of unsettlement: and yet in a meaner condition than any of these we have supposed, if a man be satisfy'd in his life and conversation, and of its agreeableness to the Christian religion, he will be most certainly satisfy'd in all the appointments of providence.

But though such careful worldlings, who are only creeping up into wealth and enjoyment, cannot be said to be happy men: yet we may think, that he who fully and freely enjoys the good things of this life; who studies to please his appetites, makes all God's temporal blessings subservient to

his lusts; who uses every thing most proper in its nature time and season, most adequate to all manner of delectation, cannot fail of an accomplished happiness.

Let us examine then these particular enjoyments apart; and to begin with the lowest; Is the glutton or voluptuary the man you will pitch upon for happiness? Surely not; happiness is a thing too fine and refined, to be mixt with such gross and sensual pleasures: besides there are so many uneasy encounters between the appetite and the object; the one nauseates and even vomits up its own pleasures, and the other becomes loathsome, and preys upon the body it should feed; so that the man is dayly and nightly too in pain and torment to digest and carry off the pleasure of one meal. Mortification and all the harshest severities of Christianity are a state of paradise, in comparison to this sort of sensuality. It is no better, if not much worse with the Drunkard, if we distinguish them; it is true, he drowns his *sorrows*, and keeps up his *spirits* for a time, but nature requires intermission of his remedy, and then the *first* return with greater force and the *other* languish and fall lower; so that the man (tho' that is not his right name) is left forlorn and quite forsaken by his beloved vice, and stands in need of a new cordial pleasure to cure the mischiefs of the old one.

But to instance in no more of this bestial race of sinners: Is the man of honour, the person you will fix this badge of happiness upon? The man who beholds with pleasure all men paying homage to him; whose praises daily fill their mouths, and
echo

echo abroad with an entire an unbroken applause and reputation; and this founded upon great actions and honourable success: it is pity but all manner of satisfaction should go along with true honour.

But oh! the torturing fears that usually oppress the soul of him that carries this bulk and burden, lest he might any way miscarry, and one miscarriage quite dash in pieces the costly fabric of his honour! The daily surmises and dread of some envious enemy that may do this for him, and cut down all his glory in a moment! He hath several parties, divers natures and dispositions, difficult humours and different designs to conform to, and an interest to keep up in the breast of almost every single man he hath to do with; so that he is truly the slave to all about him*. And if the glory of his name arise from the rabble §, he is still more unsettled in his honour, than if it depended upon any one, even the vainest, most false and inconstant single person: and we need not go as far back as *Sejanus* and an heathen multitude for an instance; later and Christian ages can supply us with enough; how suddenly and in an instant a popular applause hath been changed into cursings and bitter execrations: and the darling of the people (as not long since in a neighbouring republick †) hath had the signal honour of falling by the hands of a multitude of executioners.

* Dominationis in alios servitium suum mercedem dat: *Salust.*

§ Converso pollice vulgi Quemlibet occidunt populariter —
Juv. Sat. 3. 36.

† De Wit. Holl.

But because ghostly fears and the very natural checks of conscience may too much interrupt or lessen the enjoyments of the world; let us inquire further: Is the atheist, or that fool that says in his heart, There is no God, that laughs at providence and a future estate*; and so makes it his business to enjoy himself, and catch up as many pleasures as he possibly can; for after death there are none in his account, (and be sure he will find it so as to his own share) Is this bravado, I say, capable of an entire happiness in worldly enjoyments? No certainly! He hath not so far discarded the belief of a God and invisible powers, but his conscience sometimes in a melancholy fit, or in some leisure from his vice and pleasure, startles him with fearful apprehensions, and puts him in mind of his horrible crimes; which (if there be a God, and he is not absolutely sure there is none) can never escape his vengeance; who must necessarily be infinitely knowing to discover, and infinitely powerful and just to punish his wicked practices.

Alas! the terrors of a night-dream, a mistaken apprehension, a noise in the dark; nay even nature in some of its extraordinary effects and operations, tho' not transcending its usual course and power (as a thunder-clap and flash of lightning drove the atheistical *Roman* Emperor into a hole, that he would perhaps have scorned to have made his Asylum from the greatest power upon earth) shall so terrify, that in his heart he shall

* Nec Styga, nec tenebras, nec nomina vana timentes,

shall say his Creed, if not his Prayers; and will be ready to recant his doctrine, if he could but retain his vices. Lastly, to put them all together: Is the man of great possessions, surrounded with all these enjoyments and glories, and what more his heart can wish, and kept up to the highest confidence and security in sinning and enjoying by the most encouraging principles of Atheism, that hath all things at his command, a brisk appetite and every thing to please it; is he, I say, the man that is likely to lay a better claim to a full contentment, and an entire happiness? Not, unless you can remove from about him all the troubles in the managing and disposing of this great abundance, secure him from frequent losses, or at least fears and dangers; rid him of his uneasy desires of more; keep his pleasures from sinking, his appetites from languishing, and himself from thinking; and in effect guard him with some new happiness to insure him in the possession of these pretended felicities; besides, enjoyment doth not always follow great possessions, but oft-times a disgust even of that we but now desired; the lot of the craving and repining *Israelites*, *Psal. cvi. 15.* *And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.* And still, if all these disturbances he shall conquer or get over, God will stop him in the career of his designed enjoyments, rather than by such base means and instruments he should frame to himself a real and lasting contentment. If the nature of the things themselves doth not produce vexations enough to mud the clear stream of our felicity, God himself by his absolute do-

minion will stop the current, lest any one might have occasion to think that happiness is to be attained by any projects of men, by any other ways or methods than of his own appointment: For that rich man, in the parable immediately following the text, after a great plenty and large incomes, is indeed first a little solicitous about the disposal, *ver. 17.* but presently discards all troublesome thoughts and cares, and comforts his soul, *ver. 19.* saying, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry:* as tho' he was just resolving now to be happy in spite of providence; but *ver. 20.* God said unto him, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, and then whose shall those things be that thou hast provided?* And *ver. 21.* it is as fatally concluded against all vain projectors of enjoyment, who by a certain improvident forecast have laid in such stores for that purpose: *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself; and is not rich towards God.*

And indeed the last period of our lives must determine the point of happiness or infelicity; *sc. Ultima semper Expectanda dies homini est, diciq; beatus, &c.* And no man ought to be pronounced happy, till all is crowned with a happy exit, a glorious retreat and going off the stage of the world. *Cræsus* would not yield to this, whilst he was in his glory and wealth, tho' *Solon* had so often told him as much; but when he came to be under the torments inflicted by *Cyrus*, and near his unhappy end; he then cry'd out of the philosopher, who had been so true a prophet. And king
David

David bids us look to that end, Psal. xxxvii. 37, 38. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace: but the transgressors shall be destroyed together, the end of the wicked shall be cut off. And so I pass to the second general head,

II. To discover wherein man's life or happiness doth consist, if not in the things of this life. If all his industry, care and pains cannot compass it, where shall he find it? If all the delightful and curious pleasures, his wit and lust can project, will no way accomplish it, he hath quite lost his ends, and so is in one degree become the more miserable by the disappointment.

A combination of all those little happinesses we just now enquired into; you see will not do his business: but each having its evil or inconvenience attending, make him oftener uneasy and disordered, than quiet and peaceable. Nay, so little do they contribute to the bettering of his condition, that they can scarce add the least relief to the uneasy temperament of the body, or mend his constitution. The melancholick man is not become more sanguine by the addition of a great estate; but is as moody and distracted in his numerous thoughts and roving fancies as ever. The sanguine complexion is not more refined, but rather more sensual and brutish, and increases its troubles more than its true pleasures. The peevish and morose humour'd fellow, notwithstanding all his greatness continues as troublesome to himself and others: a certain sign he is really but little better pleased,

pleased, and his condition not much amended. And as to all external accidents that unhappily befall him, they are ever the more pressing and gauling; any failure or disappointment is more vexatious and insupportable: the stone and gout are more frequent and pungent, are commonly much increased, but no ways lessened or alleviated, by his former or any present enjoyments.

How little reason have we then to throw away one thought, one hours care or solicitude, towards the procuring of such ends, that will so little gratify us for our pains?

Now that a complete happiness even any manner of way is attainable in this life, we cannot assert; so long as our religion consists in faith, which is not absolute certainty; and in hope, which is not fruition: But a foundation of one, (and that the best that can be possibly had in this life) may here no doubt be laid, in the comfortable hopes and warrantable expectations of future bliss, founded upon the blood of Christ Jesus, and our religious conformity to his laws; which will keep up our spirits under any condition, and make us with a pleasant and religious scorn over-look all the wants and evils of this present life. Under the preceding general head this degree of happiness hath in great part been discovered; and now needs the less enquiry. It is the very consequent of moral virtues and religious graces; as to instance in that of faith.

All things are possible to him that believeth, even to change the very nature of things, and perform standing miracles; to make external necessities and sufferings,

sufferings, a condition of great consolation. The true believer knows, that God is his most wise and provident friend, and hath put him in the best and most suitable estate in this life, whatever it be, in order to that true life, which is eternal and therefore he is fully satisfied and contented. He knows that his Redeemer liveth, and that he hath made an all-sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for his sins, and purchased for him an eternal crown of glory; therefore he is not disturbed or tormented with the thoughts of his guilt or infirmities, beyond a godly sorrow: but makes his mortal life, a life of joy, and great glory, by contemplation upon that everlasting felicity, he shall one day enjoy, by the merits of his Saviour's passion, and his own obedience to his laws. He knows too, that his Almighty lawgiver and Saviour, to carry him over all difficulties, hath promised, and doth daily give him the supplies of his holy spirit, and every day defends him with a guardian Angel to support him in all his weaknesses. Therefore he fears no evil, can be crushed by no enemy, nor overthrown by any temptation. As for temporal punishments and sufferings they must be endured, because he hath been guilty of some failures and lapses; but they are pleasant in the reflection, because they are fatherly corrections, and inflicted with design of favour in gentle commutation for eternal torments. Death (of all temporal punishments thought the most dreadful) is the most delightful object, because it will put an end to them, and become a pleasant and quick passage to immortal Glory.

What

What are all the evils and sufferings of this life, if God by these methods can give a contented heart? If he can give patience great enough to bear them, what are they but the happy occasions of victory and triumph? If we can fix upon a clear prospect of heaven, and also cast an eye upon that endless misery we shall avoid, how easily shall we overlook or disregard the roughness and difficulty of the passage? For *the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*, says the Apostle, Rom. viii. 18. But says the Prophet, *Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?* Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

Thus the happiness that is attainable in this life, must issue forth from our faith and hope in the promises of God, and the merits of Christ Jesus our Lord; and is commensurate to our pious conversations, that is to say, our conformity to the proposals and conditions of salvation; upon which the soul enjoys a full content and satisfaction not to be diminished or changed by any vicissitudes of fortune, as we call the changes and chances of this mortal life by that name, but mean the various turns of divine providence. Let us then in the third place, according to our proposal at first, endeavour,

III. To fix and settle ourselves in order to what real and solid contentment and happiness is attainable upon earth; since a mans life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

It is already agreed upon, that it must be out of the infinite funds and treasures of Christianity, that we can possibly get supplies and redress for our almost infinite necessities and complaints: the method for our relief lies fairly before us.

1. We have an Almighty Saviour, whose merits in our behalf are of infinite worth and value; what have we to do, but go to him? He offers to redeem us from the everlasting wrath of God, to which we cannot but (at least) suspect we stand liable; and hath purchased for us, if we will accept it, an everlasting crown of glory and happiness: so *that* fear and care may be over with us, if we please, which if not remov'd is enough to sink a man into an abyss of doleful thoughts, though surrounded with all the worldly possessions and enjoyments that his soul can project.

2. We have too, as it were ready at our call, I mean upon our invocation (serious and holy), the Almighty spirit of God, to carry us over all those difficulties that attend the practice of virtue and religion, or any ways disturb and interrupt the delights and pleasures of a holy life.

3. Therefore for the attainment of all requisite blessings to make us happy and easy, and for the diverting of all evils and punishments that may ruffle our enjoyments, we have the privilege, (and are earnestly invited to make use of it) to make our addresses and supplications on all occasions to the throne of infinite grace; and also assurance of never coming off without a blessing, if we submit to infinite wisdom and goodness:

ness: this care too for futurities, which is the common ail and disturbance of our human estate, may be happily got over; nay, St. Paul bids us cast it quite off before-hand, and no doubt our prayers will become the more prevalent, *Phil. iv. 6. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God.*

Here then let us resolve to fix, where we shall most assuredly satisfy our uneasy souls and querulous desires: let us but try the expedient; every Christian duty, rightly performed, will bring sensible satisfaction; and if we can with patience and perseverance go thorough the whole operation, we shall not fear to accomplish the happiness that our souls, by all the powers and propensities of nature, are in such eager pursuit of.

In order then to our undisturb'd enjoyments, let us sum up all, in stating the difficulties, and then casting about, how we may remove them out of our way.

The difficulties proceed from want of resolution, and from want of knowledge.

(1. Want of resolution: The reformation of our lives seems a frightful difficult work; the reason is, because we do not so much as attempt it or make a beginning: habit and custom will soon make it easy and pleasant; *Elige vitam optimam, consuetudo faciet jucundissimam*, says the Philosopher*. “Make choice of the most virtuous sort of living, and custom will make it the most delightful”. Get but once into the road of

* Seneca, de Vit. beat.

of wisdom, and there are pleasures enough: For *her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* Prov. iii. 17.

Industry will easily make its way through the most difficult things of the world: why should Religion be such an Herculean labour? Religion! that is fitted to the meanest capacities; that is made for the poor and lowly spirit, is adapted to all states and conditions of men; and at last rewarded with the most durable gain transcending all mortal enjoyments.

Some of the atchievements of vice indeed may be difficult, and often prove so to the undertakers; but how can plain and simple virtue require such hardship in the practice? An ambitious spirit requires great and slavish attendance, whilst humility is serv'd with any thing that providence shall cast in its way. Malice puts all our faculties on the rack, whilst charity keeps them in their due temper, quiet and sedate. In a word, let any man judge, if it must not necessarily prove a more difficult task, to humour all extravagant and imperious lusts of the flesh, than to mortify and restrain them, that is, keep them within the due limits of peace and order.

(2. Want of knowledge, or inexperience of the ways of virtue and religion, together with a false and partial view of all our pleasures and vices, is another difficulty in our way to this happiness. As to the latter, let us but take a true survey of them, in their duration, effects and consequences, and consider them in the digestion as well as the taste. "If our pleasures (says Ari-
" *stotle*)

“*stotle*) look’d no better when they come toward us, than they do when they turn their back and leave us, we should never entertain them.”

Let us but enquire into the cause of those numerous anxieties and troubles of our minds; those frequent melancholy ponderings, and pensive murmurings and jealousies in our own breasts; those inward (and so more wounding) dissatisfactions, that take up the greatest part of our lives and of our thinking; and we shall find the source and origine of them all, to be our wicked actions. Our ways are evil, and we fear evil to come, and that’s the reason we are so little at ease and quiet with ourselves.

But we shall find, Religion, if we were but once ingaged in the practice, will free us from all these disquietudes, and bring peace and tranquillity to our souls. We do not know the enjoyments of a satisfied conscience; the ravishing comforts of looking back upon good actions, and forward upon an eternal crown of Glory. Then all the creatures will be blest unto us, and our enjoyment of them will be wonderfully enhanced? How strangely pleasant will that night of sleep be that follows a virtuous day? *When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid, yea thou shalt lie down and thy sleep shall be sweet,* says the wise man, that great man of knowledge and experience, *Prov. iii. 24.* Then eating, drinking, and all manner of sober and plentiful living, shall administer all the full and natural comforts unto us, without any disorderly fears and distractions.

Here

Here are then all the Encouragements our hearts can wish. Would we have riches, but can no ways come at them with all our cares and industry? Let us be rich towards God, abound in all manner of good works. Here are those true riches our Saviour speaks of *Luke xvi. 11.* Would we have them with security? *Let us lay up our treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal;* no, nor persecutions, nor the the malice of our enemies, nor our own troublesome cares and thoughts, can reach, or molest us, in the true enjoyment and possession of them.

Are we in want or distress? Our relief is at hand: seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, and all our necessities shall be supplied: betake ourselves to our religion; and that is durable and lasting gain, having the promises of this life as well as of that which is to come: that will never suffer its true followers to starve, never see the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.

Is there ambition in our desires? Let us enter ourselves into the service of Christ: he hath assured us of an honourable reward, from God himself the fountain of all true honour: *If any man serve me, him will my father honour,* John xii. 26. Nay, we shall hereby find respect with all men: the rich men of the world are hated; the high and lofty are envied; but he that is of an humble heart and behaviour, meets with no such enemies: Even the wise and learned have an adverse party to detract from them, and lessen their

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merits;

merits; but the innocent religious man forces, at least, an inward reverence and approbation from all that know him; for *when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*

What can we desire more to make us happy! Are we *hungry or thirsty, or weary or heavy laden*? Christ is that *bread of life*, that *Word* which proceedeth out of the mouth of God, by which every man must live. He is that *well of water* springing up into everlasting life: he will *give ease and rest* to our souls, when the world can afford us none.

Thus is he not only an all-sufficient sacrifice to God for our sins, but to us too every way an all-sufficient relief in all our necessities and lawful desires whatsoever. The covetous, if he be wise enough to covet the best gifts, shall here have fullness which he never had from the world: the ambitious, if he seeks for true honour, may here be great, without fear of a fall; and if he will be but generous and charitable, his name shall be had *in everlasting remembrance*. The voluptuary too, provided his palate be right, may enjoy without a surfeit even pleasures for evermore.

To conclude then, if it be (as it is evident from our own experience, an infallible judge) impossible, that any man can be completely happy in all the abundance of the things which he possesses or enjoys; and likewise as impossible, that a truly religious man can be miserable: If all these temporal possessions and enjoyments lie far out of the reach and compass of most of us; but heavenly

ly offers are equally made to us all, and not set out of the reach of any the meanest and most inconsiderable amongst us: How perversely stupid must we needs be, if we spend all our time and strength upon that which we either cannot obtain, or, if attain'd, will bring nothing but care and vexation, or perish in the enjoyment! when without all these things we may with greater ease, and more real content and satisfaction to ourselves, purchase a far more transcending, even an everlasting felicity: the prospect and hopes of which, as also the pleasant means and methods of obtaining it, are the beginning and antepast of an heavenly enjoyment upon earth, and consequently the happiness we have been enquiring after.

Consider then of these things: complain not of poverty, nor sufferings, nor the lowest station in this life: you may be all happier than princes, that hold only for their lives: scepters and crowns and everlasting habitations lie at your feet, but not to be trampled upon. The Gospel is free amongst us all; the means of salvation the same: the difference in our present condition is but trivial, and not at all considered with God, nor any way hinders that great end our immortal souls are design'd unto; but his infinite justice and mercy are visible and justifiable, in that everlasting life he hath prepared for all those who believe in him, love him, fear him, and obey his commandments: but everlasting destruction for those who reject him and such great offers of salvation, that may be attain'd upon such easy and gentle conditions; who will not come to him that

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they

they might have life. God of his infinite mercy grant that we may live the true happy comfortable life of holiness in this world, that in the next we may be advanced to the blessedness of Saints and Angels to all eternity, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

SERMON III.

Of Coming to *CHRIST*.

JOHN V. 40.

Ye will not come to me, that ye might have Life.

THE blessed Jesus, even in the compass of this single chapter (had the Gospels extended no farther) gave to the *Jews* sufficient evidence of his mission from God.

1. *First*, If they would believe their eyes; here is a signal miracle (besides an appeal to innumerable more) done in the face of *Jerusalem*, before a great multitude, upon a man that had had an infirmity thirty and eight years; who had waited long for a turn, to be put into the pool *Bethesda* upon the descent of the Angel, and his troubling

bling the waters; and might perhaps have waited long enough for a perfect cure, had not a more sovereign virtue, than could have been hoped from thence, given him a quicker dispatch.

2. If they would stand to their own creed, believe in *Moses* in whom (*v. 45.*) *they trusted*, or search the Scriptures in which (*v. 39.*) they thought, *they had eternal life*; he desired no fairer testimonials. There, from *Moses* and the prophets, they might find his character and office, as plain and visible as could be drawn out and described under types and figures, and in a prophetick stile.

3. If they would consult their own interest and security: They were then gazing for a Messiah; their expectations were big and ready for birth; their prophecies, as to time, were known to be at or near their period: and in that Messiah they hoped for no less than a plenitude of satisfaction both as to their doubts and desires. How came it, they did not more sharply look about them, when the supreme blessing of heaven was every day expected? which if they overlooked or rejected, they must be for ever a ruined people, without hopes of restitution to that peculiarity of favour, they had so long and signally enjoy'd, above all the nations upon earth.

Now behold! one walking amongst them, (what would the wretches have?) who fully answered all their predictions, and filled up the character of that mighty prophet, like unto *Moses*, and indeed far greater than he, who was ready to solve their doubts and *tell them all things*: had a kingdom too to bestow upon them, not of this

world indeed; for none such are brought from heaven; but such as was more proper for a God to give than all the glories of the world, and would prove more gainful and satisfactory to every wise and pious receiver: a kingdom that cannot be removed, but standeth fast for ever.

There was no one sign or mark of imposture about him: his very virtues in the transcendent practice of them were as miraculous as any of his wonders; and he had no ends of his own, unless, by taking upon himself both the flesh and guilt of mankind, their safety may be called his self-interest.

And because nothing would please them without something in hand, for an ensurance and earnest of that eternal life he had offered; he gives new life, new senses, new limbs and members, at least, the entire restitution of all, to the lame, the blind, the deaf, the diseased, the possessed, nay, to the very dead: by which surely he merited amongst them the name of Jesus, or a Saviour, had he brought no other salvation: yet he could neither convince them, nor content them; they would have none of his life or salvation: let him go as he came; who sent for him?

Thus he reduced them to the grossest absurdities, against matter of fact, against a whole course of miracles and their standing creed, against their senses, and against their interest; and here in the text upbraids them with obstinate stupidity as well as base ingratitude; both, the highest aggravations of guilt and unworthiness: *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* To make which

which words of useful reproof to ourselves; let us consider.

I. What is it to come unto Christ for life.

II. Wherein we are defaulters, in not coming unto Christ for life.

III. The heinousness of the sin and unworthiness, in not coming unto him, which is refusing life. And

IV. Some encouragements shall be laid down to hasten us to go unto him, that we might have life.

I. We are to enquire and consider, what it is to come unto Christ for life.

Coming unto Christ Jesus (without consulting expositors) is of easy interpretation, and includes no less than coming into his cause and communion, and entirely submitting to his laws. By every moral virtue and Christian duty we make an advance towards him. And *life* denotes that true valuable (not animal) life, held forth to us by our Lord in the Gospels (as hath been abundantly illustrated in the preceding *Discourse*) which is to begin in holiness, and virtue, and contentment in this world, and to pass into eternal bliss and glory in the next: and is of so great price, that to find or save it, we must on all occasions be ready to lose or sacrifice this present or common life.

But as *coming to him* denotes our first setting forth, and coming off from infidelity and a sinful conversation; so it is generally expounded, our approaching to him by faith, as appears from many places of Scripture, where *coming* and *believing* are interchangeably used. As Heb. xi. 6. *He that cometh unto God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*: So in the next chapter to that of my text, (*John vi. 35.*) *I am, saith Christ, the bread of life, he that cometh to me, shall never hunger; he that believeth on me, shall never thirst*; where *coming* is expounded by *believing*: And v. 37. *All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me, and he that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out*: So Matt. xi. 28. an invitation is made, *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*: whether it were with diseases or with sins they were over-burdened, Faith must be their relief; it was ever the prime qualification and disposition, to capacitate them for the receiving of his divine Spirit, and also the benefits of his miraculous cures.

So we need no further to explicate the words, than by saying that *coming to him* is *believing on him*; and believing is all. For, did we but soundly believe him to be the sole author and giver of life, that is to say, all that is truly happy and desirable in this world, and that which is to come; by the common principles and dictates of nature, self-love and preservation, we should more than barely come, even mend our pace and fly unto him. So that, in the second place,

II. It

II. It is soon discovered, wherein we are defaulters, in not coming unto Christ for life. The charge against us can be no less than infidelity. It is much to be feared, that we do not yet believe in him. He offers life, and he hath fair testimonials that he offers no more than he is able to make good; and it is life and happiness that we all so eagerly desire, and nature itself pushes us on in the pursuit of it: yet it is plain we do not go to Christ for life; we do not make that application to him, we would do even to any inconsiderable person that we believed could happily do us a kindness in time of need.

For what is it, but a certain sort of faith, that moves us, and gives life and vigour to most of our actions in the affairs of the world? Before we set forth upon any design or end that is worthy of our pursuit; the first incitement to move, arises from a belief or persuasion of some advantage: nay, sometimes though it be but conjecture, or a bare possibility, we are presently upon the wing to put in execution all due and adviseable means, that shall be proper for that end.

Now what is become of the Christian's faith, if he doth not forthwith go unto Christ for life? The *Jews* did not believe in him, and therefore came not to him but upon quarrelsome designs. And it looks suspicious, tho' it sounds like a paradox, that innumerable *Christians*, that is, professors of that religion, do not believe in their own Jesus. It is our Saviour's own notion of faith, that, if sound, it must infallibly draw on a conformity to what

what is believed. The *Jews* were zealous of *Moses's* law, and yet our Lord will not allow, they believed in *Moses*: so he plainly enough tells them in the two last verses of this chapter. For *had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?* Believing in *Moses*, or in Christ, aright, is capable of no other proof, but what must be made good in matter of fact; which can be no less than a conformity in mind and practice to their doctrines and precepts.

To put your faith to the test, examine yourselves upon these following topicks of enquiry.

I. Presupposing your belief of a God, (whom not to believe, is too hard a task for men of reason) are you sensible that you are in a laps'd estate, a fallen condition? unhappily descended from parents that by some fatal miscarriage (tho' so long ago as the creation) had contracted such corruption and guilt that became hereditary, and not to be rooted out of your natures but by some sovereign restoratives? (many heathens by the light of nature were apprehensive of as much) and, to keep yourselves down under that dead weight, do you not know by woful experience, (which is infallible, that is, an evidence above faith) that you are guilty of many actual failures and wilful transgressions, and thereupon liable to the eternal wrath of God? to whose nature and essence all moral evil must be direct opposition and rebellion; and surely his justice and power (which are infinite) must vindicate his honour, and cannot but do execution upon his enemies.

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This very thought cannot but rouse us into solicitude and enquiry, how to retrieve the true life and blessed estate so manifestly lost; and the redress cannot be from ourselves, who are fallen below all human abilities of recovery. To be restored to life, we must seek to some divine power, which is able to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light.

2. Therefore are we persuaded, That this guilt, both original and actual, must by some means or other be removed, before there can be any hope of obtaining the favour of our Creator, or being restored to the life we have lost; That something must intervene betwixt God and us, before so wide a breach can be made up. And further,

3. Do you believe, That Christ Jesus came into the world for this purpose, to set us right in the favour of God, and to restore us to life by laying down his own, of inestimable value? That what he did for us in this extremity was attested by the highest evidences; the Almighty power of working miracles, the most transcendent vertuous life, and the most pure refined god-like doctrine? That man could not effect this himself, being the guilty party; nor Angels for him, who themselves have been charged with folly; but the son of God only, God and man, the immaculate lamb of infinite price, to pay the ransom, and to make the purchase for us?

4. Lastly, Do you likewise believe, That this Christ Jesus, in this covenant of grace and reconciliation, hath required some conditions (as in all reason and justice ought) to be performed on our part,

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part, which cannot possibly be dispensed with? That we must receive him as our lawgiver, as well as our Saviour? That we must repent, and believe the Gospel; and bring forth fruits meet for that repentance and that faith, by submitting to all the precepts and injunctions of our Lord, or else all his purposes of salvation will be made null and void? Tho' his redemption be universal in the offer, as it is of infinite sufficiency in the value; yet according to covenants it can only be extended to those, who come in and submit to the terms of reconciliation.

These are the great foundations of our Christian faith; and great incitements too, to come unto Christ for life; and such concessions as every Christian professor will readily make.

Now let the question be put home; Whether it be possible for a rational man, who moves so vigourously by faith, and sometimes bare conjecture in worldly matters, to be soundly convinced of these truths, and not immediately with a trembling zeal, lest he should not come time enough, run in all haste, and prostrate himself before the altar of such an Almighty and only Saviour?

Altho' our faith cannot be the subject of demonstration, yet this is a conclusion that is demonstrable: and from the deficiency of the effects, we can argue no less than a most certain defect, or rather total denial of the first principles. We are naturally too wary and provident, to let go so great promises, did we but believe them: and too timorous and cowardly, to run the venture

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even of a probable damnation. And therefore, we may be sure, our infidelity lies deeper than we have imagined.

It may be objected indeed, That men, tho' they believe never soundly, may defer and put off this conforming practice, by satisfying themselves, and keeping up their spirits, with a hope, that after some delays of coming unto him, and after they have had a good share of worldly enjoyments, they may at last come time enough, or redeem their time by doubling their diligence; and so come in, and regain all, with a more intense faith and repentance; and thereby be intitled to as good a reward, as those that bore the burden and heat of the day.

It is true, delays (tho' they are ever dangerous) are usual with us in the affairs of the world, even when wisdom and common prudence call for the quickest dispatch: but none but madmen procrastinate in matters that concern their very being; the saving their lives, or their whole estates: none but such stand gazing upon the flames whilst their houses are all on fire. This is our case; till we reform and take up, we are in an undone condition: by sin, we are every day consuming, and are in danger every moment of sinking into everlasting burnings: and to defer our conversion one moment, is a more desperate venture, than any of us dare make in the closer concerns of the world, that is, whilst we are in our wits. For profligates, and desperadoes of all sorts, are exceptions in both relations, such as act in violence to nature and all its interests: but we are arguing with those
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that have not quite renounced the conduct of that reason, which directs and moves mankind to seek its common safety and preservation.

It is life that lies at stake; the prize to be gain'd or lost: *And skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.* Job ii. 4. They are the words of Satan, and no lie, but a true observation upon the irresistible tendency of human nature to the security of life. Brutal instinct will prompt us to look after life. Reason and Revelation, which give us so fair a prospect of the truest life, must necessarily inflame us with the most ardent desires to obtain it; especially upon this encouraging, tho' at the same time very tremendous consideration, *viz.* That the life we are pursuing is eternal bliss; but if we miss, or refuse it, the inevitable fate is everlasting death.

Thus it is plain from reason and experience, and necessarily inferable from our human and secular actings, by the like motives, That it is a manifest defect in our faith, that we do not mend our pace in coming unto Christ for life. Therefore is faith set forth to us in Scripture as the whole of Christianity. Christ calls for our faith, and the Apostles call for our faith; as tho' no more were needful, if that stand but right and firm, towards the obtaining of eternal life; obedience will follow in course. *He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me,* says our Lord, (v. 24. of this chap.) *hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life;* and in the following chap. ver. 47. *Verily, I say unto you; he that believeth on me, hath everlasting*

everlasting life. And in the chap. following that, ver. 38. *He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* And *John ii. 25, 26.* *He that believeth on me, tho' he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never dye:* such a powerful faith cannot fail of that irresistible influence upon us, as forthwith to send us to him whom we know to be the author and preserver of life: and *This is life eternal,* says our Lord again, *John xvii. 3.* *to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

Now the acknowledgment and confession you every day make; but do not forget putting the question home to yourselves upon every profession, Whether you do firmly believe it. It was St. Paul's advice to the *Corinthians* that had for some time been Christian professors: (*2 Cor. xiii. 5.*) *Examine yourselves, whether ye are yet in the faith; prove your own selves.* Are you then fully persuaded, that Christ Jesus the Son of God did come into the flesh for those purposes and ends revealed in the Gospel, to lay before you the offers of everlasting life and happiness; and upon refusal, the denunciations of everlasting death and damnation? Who is that audacious believer, that can say, his mind and soul is fully convinced and satisfied in this point, and yet by his vicious course of life, walking directly contrary to the faith of the Gospel, gives the most demonstrable proof (which is matter of fact) that he defies immortal life and glory; and dares (exceeding all the bounds of true valour) look that death in the face, which
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is not to kill, but keep him alive in eternal and the most exquisite torments? And this brings us to the next consideration, *viz.*

III. The heinousness of the sin, and the unworthiness, in not coming unto Christ for life. Although we have founded the guilt of not coming unto Christ for life in infidelity only, without naming any other subsequent defaults, yet in this is it sufficiently aggravating beyond all alleviation, that, after all our professions, we are not yet got over our Creed. Because, as God intended the greatest blessing to mankind in sending his Son; so, that it might not fail of acceptance, or be liable to any possible objection or distrust, he brought along with him such credentials of an Almighty power, to avouch his authority and doctrine, that human reason, unless blinded with the most stubborn and resolv'd prejudice, could not withhold its assent and submission.

So that, after all enquiries concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost, here the sting of it is thought to lie, *viz.* That God, designing not to command, or force the faith of men, by any arbitrary decree or edict, with dire anathema's against unbelievers (as surely, if that can be done, it is the prerogative of heaven only) vouchsafed to clear the way, by all the most powerful and convincing evidences that possibly could be given, (even to satisfy the sensitive faculties of men) the utmost proofs that the most luxuriant curiosity could require. And yet the *Jews*, the *Pharisees* in chief, who, one would have thought, should have

have discerned best, resisted the Almighty spirit, by which the Son of God wrought those great wonders, ascribing them to the power of the most wicked spirit; and also refused the life that was insured by them, pursuing to death the bold undertaker, that should offer to save their souls.

Now as this crime is the highest we can frame any conception of, because it was a resistance of the highest evidence that possibly could be given even by an Almighty power; and so we hope more principally to be charged on them who were eye-witnesses of such uncontrollable miracles; yet the entail of guilt cannot be so entirely cut off, but that in a great degree it must descend upon us, who have too as mighty evidences as possibly can be given, that these first confirmations of our religion were made.

Nay, as to some circumstances we may justly fear the aggravation may be greater on our side. They opposed him to his face, we covertly: they more generously, we more treacherously: they by a resolute infidelity, we after many solemn professions, and impudent confessions of faith, in his very presence, over and over again repeated: they as man environ'd with many difficulties, subject to violence, and and a mortal fate; we, after we have acknowledged his divinity, and his triumphs over death, his ascension into heaven, and his exaltation at the right hand of God: they, when they had all their *Rabbies* and wisemen on their side, who were their teachers and abettors; when they had a law too of an undoubted divine stamp and impress, which they thought of never-

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ceasing obligation, that they could not too much adhere to it, or be too jealous of innovation; we, when the whole vogue of the church is against us, all the wise and holy doctors and preachers for many ages, founding denunciations against infidelity, and so many thousands of the best rank of men stand upon record for confessors and martyrs in the cause, who have given demonstrative proof of their contempt of present life, to secure the life offered by Christ. In a word, when we have no other law or religion to intercept our preference of the Christian, or to stand in competition with it, that can give the least satisfaction to our enquiring minds, the least pretence to our reason or judgments to make a new choice, to seek out for a surer rule and guidance towards a blessed estate.

(1.) *First* then, Our refusal and resistance of life is very heinous, because of that great light we shut our eyes against, that clear revelation of, and plain instruction in the way of life. It was not one only flash or a single star (and yet that enough to conduct wise men to seek out for the world's Saviour), but the most glorious constellation; the brightest illuminations that ever were made from heaven: and as those signs and wonders then wrought were as so many shining stars to illustrate the glory and power of the Lord of life, so like them in the firmament are they represented as innumerable, as our Evangelist hath left upon Record in the close of his gospel: That if the things which Jesus did, should be written every one, he supposes that even the world itself, could not contain

tain the books that should be written: an allowable hyperbole, to express that Almighty power by, which was then exerted for the conviction of the world in innumerable or almost infinite instances.

But now let us take heed that this clear light be not overcast by our infidelity; how great must that darkness be? Much the more dismal, for the light it hath over-shadowed. *This is the condemnation*, says our Lord, (*John* iii. 19.) *that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light*. What a fatal attendant was this, That salvation should bring damnation along with it? As tho' hell were only a place originally design'd for devils and fallen spirits; hypocritical and apostate *Christians* have voluntarily thronged those regions of death and darkness, and there deserve to be chained for ever with those *rebellious angels*, because they have rejected life and light; sins of much the same magnitude: These have refused the offer, as They forfeited the possession of everlasting happiness.

Again *John* xv. 22. *If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin*: As tho' sin too, as well condemnation, took its force and sting from Christ's coming upon earth: now there is no excuse, no covering for your guilt, and before no protection from the punishment. All pleadings and pretences will afford as little shelter as calling out to the rocks and mountains to fall on you, and hide you from the wrath of the Lamb.

What will become of the heathens that never heard, nor indeed could hear of these proposals of life and salvation, we have no authority to determine: we may evidently, and with all certainty pronounce upon our own estate and expectations. It seems it will be tolerable for them; in our own reason and God's justice, it must needs be intolerable for us. They are capable of excuse, and their sins of alleviation, whilst the mouth of the pretended Christian (as rational as he thinks himself and much wiser than a heathen) shall be stopped; only to be opened into wailings and groans and dismal bemoanings of his endless misery.

All objections against hell-torments, as improbable, as too severe and long a punishment, for so inconsiderable a sinner as mortal man (not worth God's anger), are taken off by Christianity: the sufferings are but adequate to his provocations; and tho' infinite in pain and duration, yet, as we may say, but just commensurate to his crimes, for sinning against so great light, and refusing such a free and gracious offer, even everlasting life and glory. How can we think to escape, if we neglect so great salvation? He that despised *Moses's* law, dyed without mercy under two or three witnesses; and he that violates some human laws, tho' done in an instant, and indeliberate, the effect of a sudden passion, or the pinch of extreme necessity, yet he must die the death, and be for ever cut off from the land of the living. Now, of how much forer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot
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the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace! Have you not reason then to fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should fall short of it; but the calamity will be more desperate and dreadful in falling home into everlasting destruction. As thus our refusal and resistance is very heinous and aggravating, because of that great light we so obstinately shut our eyes against; so in the 2^d place,

(2.) Our guilt is further enhanced upon many very obliging *instances* of signal favours from the Son of God, who holds forth this life and salvation to us, of which I shall need name but *two*: of these the

1. *First* is, His taking upon him our flesh, assuming our whole natures, with all our infirmities, sin only excepted; as tho' coming into the world to see what we wanted, and to discover our ailes and complaints, that he might bear the burden of our grievances, as well as the punishment of our sins, and also discry the powers of temptations abroad, as well as of our own natural propensities at home: that he might too be a leading example of resistance against all these evils of our human nature, and afterwards become the more suitable mediator in cases that he had himself experienced: all which tho' he could not but fully know before as God, yet a sensible discovery was proper and necessary, and hath ever been usual in divine proceedings, even for God himself, to treat mankind after such a sensible manner, as

comports with their own way and method of examining and judging matters. So *Gen. xviii. 20, 21. saith the Lord, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come to me, and if not I will know.* How fair and just were these proceedings levelled to the methods of human justice? Before execution I will go down myself, and examine into the matter. But how enravishing is the condescension here in our case? "The cries of all the children of men are come up unto me; they will be for ever lost without a Saviour; and they are utterly unable to help themselves; I will go down and see their distress, and make a personal abode amongst them: I will put myself into their case and circumstances, will acquaint myself with all their grievances and infirmities, by assuming their whole nature: so that as many as will yield to the restorative methods of life and salvation; shall more than recover their lost estate; they shall reign with me in everlasting bliss and glory."

And this is the solemn day * when the deity enter'd upon this grand action, this great but lowly design of an Almighty Saviour. He must become man to save mankind: but he must not be conceiv'd and born like man. As sin was excepted from his humanity; so he that was to restore life and immortality, was to come into the world by a different generation from that which was the product of the first sin, or original corruption.

* *Annunciation of the Virgin Mary observ'd at Christ-Church, Canterbury.*

on. A great Archangel is sent to address a pure Virgin for his reception and incarnation; before the most holy and virtuous one upon earth; for the Holy Ghost was to come upon her, and the power of the highest to over-shadow her, because the holy thing that was to be born of her, was the Son of God. There is another day* too, now approaching, for our

2. *Second Instance*, to put us in mind of our great unworthiness, and indeed basest ingratitude, in rejecting life from the hands of the Son of God, who hath purchased it for us by laying down his own of inestimable value. He dyed for us, to redeem us from the everlasting wrath of God, to which we had made ourselves liable by our sins against his infinite justice and goodness. An act that could only be done by taking upon him our mortal nature, but in itself above humanity. Whilst men were enemies too, riper for vengeance than any designs of mercy. Here, as the satisfaction for the obligation was infinite; here it is in vain to attempt (as well as impossible to be done) any proportionable returns; but the obligation runs higher still, in that he hath himself prescribed the most easy and gentle ones: for the main difficulties are over, the ransom paid, the inheritance ours; we are only to remember him in his passion and sufferings, to shew forth his death till his coming; to be charitable and peaceable, that is, human and good-natur'd one towards another: (one main purpose and design of his infinite love towards us being to enflame ours to one another).

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* *Good-Friday, or Passion-day.*

In a word, to form our conversations according to his example and precepts, a pattern of wisdom, as well as of virtue and holiness: which amounts to no more than setting our seal to the covenant, signing the agreement: *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life: And he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life,* (John iii. 36.) and thereupon declaring our acceptance of the proposals, and taking out our pardons upon submission to the conditions, *Mat. xix. 17. He that will enter into life, let him keep the commandments:* We are mightily wrong'd indeed! our Faith is no way strain'd, we believe in our own favour and behalf, and such things as are founded upon the infallible evidence of an Almighty power; and in conformity to that faith, a religious, that is, a virtuous life, is all that is required of us; which the heathen moralists had decided long before, to be the most delightful in itself, and most advantageous to all the ends of this present life, tho' they should look no further: And a wiser than them all hath pronounced, that *In the way of righteousness is life, and in the path-way thereof there is no death,* Prov. xii. 28. Let us then under this refusal ever lay before us our base unworthiness to our Redeemer; our horrid unnatural enmity to our own self-eternal-preservation. To refuse the greatest offer from the greatest majesty, pardon for the greatest offences, and deliverance from the greatest punishments, is an obstinacy we would pronounce barbarous and inhuman, were it to be found any where but amongst Christian professors.

To

To accept of these gracious offers too, we are invited, importuned, with arms stretched forth all the day-long, begging for our mutual embraces: *Why will ye die? Why will ye not come unto me, that ye might have life?* The whole proposal is all love, with no other design, but that we should live, and not perish for ever: *In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* 1 John iv. 9.

What moving complaints are made all over the Scriptures of our refusal; as tho' all the wrong was done to him that holds forth the blessing? What a shameful thing is it, that life and salvation should be, as 'twere, merely expos'd amongst us, and offered at the easiest rates, yet meet with so few purchasers? Nay, that what is of inestimable value will not go off with us, tho' it may be had without money and without price? *Wherefore,* (says the prophet *Isaiab chap. lv.* in his prophetick complaints, of rejecting the highest blessings of heaven, even the mercies of the gospel) *do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness: Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.* These expressions, in the most inviting manner and taking language, do set forth to us the truest and most substantial blessings, such as are of easy attainment, will fill our desires, and make us happy
for

for ever. Take heed then of venturing too far in the refusal, but follow his advice in the *sixth* and *seventh* verses of the same chapter, lest frequent and obstinate disregard shut up the mercies for ever from you: *Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

IV. I promised to conclude all with some further Encouragements to come unto Christ for life, if the bare offer shall not prove sufficient; tho' one would think one should not need them: none for wealth, or ease, or pleasure, want a persuasive harangue.

But what a do there is to persuade men to look after heaven, which they have in their view; to accept of rest and salvation and eternal life, after they are out of the troubles and vexations of this wicked world? One would think preaching and such other methods would be quite useless; as in effect and matter of fact they too often prove; so rarely doth the good seed light upon good ground: For the Lord, *Who hath believed our report* * ? says the Prophet, says our Saviour, says the Apostle: and the time was never yet, when the complaint might not be repeated.

One would think it should be enough, if proclamation were only made, the law promulged, and indemnity declared upon *such* conditions.

Must

* Isa. liii. 1. John xii. 38. Rom. x. 16.

Must a prisoner not only have the doors opened, but be intreated and pressed with all alluring arguments to leave his dungeon, and go out into light and liberty? Or a malefactor that is going to the gibbet, have a speech made to him, to prevail upon him to accept of a pardon or reprieve?

Now if men could for ever preserve themselves in this present station of life (such as it is) or find out a way to elude the stroke of death; all arguments for a better change might prove dull and ineffectual: but when nature hath never fail'd to prove the inevitable necessity of that fate; not to provide for what may possibly come after, is a stupidity so purely brutish, that it proves our reason of no other use, but for the base and sensual offices of this life; and so not nobler, only superiour in cunning, in worldly and selfish designs, to the instinct of the beasts that perish.

But death hastens on, even as fast as we live: and Christ holds out life to us, such as will make death the most triumphant period and happy crisis of our mortality, which shall let us into immortal glory: let us frame ourselves then to receive these rational (or to say no more than probable) proposals of life and salvation, upon these following considerations.

1. As I have proved Faith, whether relating to the futurities of this world or the next, to be of mighty influence upon all our motions and actions; so then, for the raising of that, we cannot but acknowledge this for an undoubted truth, That the motives we have to believe, are far more powerful, than those we have for not believing,
Atheism

92 Of COMING to CHRIST.

Atheism is a violence upon nature itself, it gets possession by coming in the back-way, that is, by the will, an obstinate resolution to have it so, for present quiet and enjoyment in our vices: It is otherwise too much for our reason and understanding to wield. Now the will is in rebellion, nature is out of its course, when not subject to that superior faculty that constitutes man: Let us then but reduce that to order, and we shall think other things; could we bring in a willing mind to those motives of our Faith, infidelity would soon vanish, and no Atheistical tenet would be suffered so much as to be made a supposition.

2. Let us consider again, If Christianity must be put to the test, that we cannot find out any other religion in the world, so fitting for a rational man to embrace, as the Christian; none so satisfactory in its testimonials, and in its promises: none so clean and genuine to human nature in its precepts, none like it, even for the present welfare both of soul and body.

Now, some time or other, the boldest sinner cannot but startle into horror, to think that he is to die, and as yet hath taken no advantage or help from any religion at all: and if his soul survive his body, (as he cannot but suspect as much) can he think it possible that it should exist without that horror? and then certainly he hath provided himself a hell upon earth; hath treasured up guilt and remorse enough to make a fund for everlasting torments.

Besides,

Besides, when he comes to these thoughts, and upon the approaches of death, his Atheism and infidelity commonly fall off and desert him, his lusts and pleasures as usually forsake him: The case is quite altered with him, and his sentiments wholly changed; his vices have a loathsome aspect, which before diverted his melancholy, and kept him from thinking; he commences believer to his horror, but death will not stay for the completion of his Faith: He hath nothing to look forward upon now but the confusion of eternity, everlasting life or death; the former he hath disregarded and refused through all the vigour of his age, the best of his days; and surely can have little hopes of preventing the latter with the remains of so little time and strength, and by such a weakly repentance, that cannot fail of having all the symptoms of his crazy body.

Let us then accept of life, while it is offered: an immortal one will be a difficult attainment at that time when we shall not be able to hold a mortal one: one day, one hour, or minute, is too long a time to run the hazzard of eternal life: The very instant, which we may possibly expire in, is the very point of time for our conversion; behold *now* is the accepted time, behold *now* is the day of salvation.

3. *Lastly*, Let us but contemplate upon the ease and pleasure of this present life, when once this main concern is taken care of, and we have laid hold on eternal life: It is an inviolable enjoyment; no troubles nor disquietudes, not the fear of death can possibly disturb it; no storms
or

or tempests can cloud its serenity; no malice or ill-nature or hard-dealings of wicked men (the worst of all evils and enmities) can ruffle its placidity and peace: It is happiness in perfection, and paradise restored, only with this alloy and pleasant uneasiness, an earnest desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, in full possession of that glorious life, he hath promised to all them that come unto him. *Amen.*

SERMON IV.

Of VANITY.

PSALM XXXIX. 5.

— *Verily every man at his best estate is altogether Vanity.*

THE vanity of the creature, but especially man, as the most signal instance, the true original, is a subject so very old and beaten, that we find it taken up by the first preacher we read of; *vanity of vanities*, saith the preacher, *vanity of vanities, all is vanity*: yet tho' so old, we have every day under the pretended improvements of the world so much new matter, that

that no new subject can afford us greater variety.

The world indeed thinks itself much wiser, as it is much older, and will not allow the decays of nature (the usual dotage of declining years); but as wisdom and knowledge have increased, so hath also vanity; nay, hath ever got the start of all the improvements and pretended perfections of the world.

Both these royal Prophets, Father and Son, have made the best and, truly, earliest discoveries of the vanity of the creature: and experience made them the best judges, having themselves tried the best and worst state of worldly matters. But more especially, we find throughout all their writings they studied men, and found out the blind side of human-kind: That all things were vanity, but man transcendently so, and universally so: *Surely every man is vanity*, as our *Psalmist* repeats it over again, *ver. 11.* and elsewhere pursues the same subject, which his son fully completes in his *Ecclesiastes*, or the words of the Preacher (as it is stiled *Ecclef. i. 1.*) *the Son of David, king of Jerusalem.*

And indeed man is the source of all vanity; other creatures keep to their natural station and instinct, and are only vain for their short and momentary beings, or the poor relief they afford to man's well being, or are accidentally made so by our misusing of them: But man launches forth into all the extravagancies of vanity, and outstrips all his fellow-creatures, to be ridiculous beyond the attainment of a brute: Alas! those inferior animals have not the reason or wit, (an unhappy

happy distinction on our side) to make a vain shew, or *disquiet themselves in vain*; it is man alone, wise and rational man, that *at his best estate is altogether vanity*.

So then take him in all the variety of his behaviour and humours, in his *best* and most settled estate (for so much the original imports;) nay, in the *best* management of his affairs, in the subtilty and strength of all his designs and projectings; even in the pre-eminency of his reason, and pretended excellency of his wisdom: when he designs to look and speak wisest, and put off the face of vanity; when he thinks he is most in the right, and his achievements are most successful; take him with all his advantages, and dress him up above nature, with all the improvements of arts and sciences, and he is still the veryest fop in the creation, the merest antick that appears upon the stage of the world.

But to deal fairly with him, and lay no more to his charge than can be made good, we will examine him more methodically, and see if there be any thing in him besides vanity. In which trial of him, we may shew him more than ordinary favour; that is, overlook his greater blots and stains, and rather mark those smaller specks, which perhaps he thinks add to his beauty.

I. *First*, We will consider him in his civil and secular capacity; *He is altogether vanity*.

II. In his moral and divine estate, as he is the Son and Disciple of virtue, and wisdom, and religion:

religion; as he is guided by reason, and prettendedly governed by conscience: there too, he is *vanity*.

III. *Lastly*, We must endeavour to discover a state or condition of life, really the best, and only one not subject to vanity.

I. *First*, We are to consider man in his civil and secular capacity; at the best of this, he is *altogether vanity*.

Let him then settle his foundation not on the sand, but upon the hardest rock: Let him project to himself a platform of the best security, and frame his designs (as he thinks) by the surest policy; yet, first or last, the result of all shall be nothing but vanity. I shall not trouble you with the meaner and grosser trash of vanity, the tirings and trappings of it, the ridiculous affectations in mode and behaviour; but am to keep close up to the emphatical point in the text, That man at his *best* estate is *altogether vanity*.

Now the greatest confidence that men usually have in the things of the world arises from a great estate of wealth and treasure: hence the ambitious fear no evil, but are insulting and tyrannical: *They are high-minded*, says St. Paul, (1 Tim. vi. 17.) *They oppress the poor, and draw them before the judgment-seats*, says St. James. (James ii. 6.)

But to come to a closer view; what is the foundation of all this confidence? but a greater portion of the earth we tread on, or some refined

part of it, some rubbish taken out of its bowels, burnish'd and made shining (to please the fool) and stamp'd with some image and superscription. But observe the vanity; are we children when we play with trifles, and wise men when we please ourselves with these greater toys? Or rather to confirm our vanity, are we not like them, given to change, and throw away one foolery, to take up another? The difference can be no more, than that the one is the pleasure and divertisement of children, and the other of men; but both the same vanity.

Should Angels, or some nobler beings than ourselves, look down from another orb, and behold us upon earth, thus employing our rational faculties in scrambling for such worthless prizes (the scene would be little changed from a child to a man) they must needs have the same sentiments of us, as we have of children, nay, of ideots or madmen, and before judge us unfit ever to be advanced to their society.

But whatsoever they do, God, who certainly doth behold us, must necessarily discover more than bare folly and vanity, even that which must be highly provoking in his sight; to see mortals joined to an immortal soul, and designed for an immortal and eternal existence after this life, and yet taking not the least care whether it be in everlasting felicity or everlasting burnings: exercising all the powers of their reason, their wisdom and providence, to purchase that which when obtain'd cannot satisfy or fill the mind of man; and from which they must soon be parted by

by the fatal irresistible stroke of death, and then step into eternity, a state they scarce ever thought of, and never made any serious provision for.

But the worldling's vanity will sufficiently appear, tho' like a *Jew* (as he is) he looks no farther than a temporal *Canaan*; because all the effects of his providential care only prove him to be a sort of industrious dunce, studying and labouring to grow rich, and poring upon his treasures; but neither profiting himself with them, nor indeed any body else till he is out of the way.

Let all his endeavours be as prosperous as his greedy soul can wish, and his coffers filled with his daily incomes; yet still his uneasy desires are as distant from satisfaction, as at his first setting out: which argues not only a vanity and insufficiency in the creature to satisfy, but the most ridiculous absurdity in the pretended rational man, who, different from all other creatures, hath no measures in his desires, nay, desires and craves with a design not to enjoy. *He that loveth silver* (says the preacher) *shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance, with increase; this is also vanity.* Eccles. v. 10. And v. 13. *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.* They are ever tortured with the uneasy desires of more whilst they live, and give only a happy occasion to those about them to rejoyce at their death. Eccl. ii. 18, 19. *Yea, I hated all my labour, which I had taken under the sun, because I shall leave it unto the man that shall be after me: and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet shall*

*he have rule over all my labour wherein I have labour-
ed, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the
sun; this is also vanity. And again ch. vi. v. 2. 4.
A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth and
honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of
all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to
eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is va-
nity, and it is an evil disease. For he cometh in with
vanity, and departeth in darkness; and his name
shall be covered with darkness. Thus, as our Psal-
mist goes on in the ver. following the text, Surely
every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are
disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and know-
eth not who shall gather them.*

But the covetous man is too gross an instance
of vanity, to be longer insisted upon; let us there-
fore cast him out of our list, and throw him amongst
the rubbish of worldly vanities, and come to the
examination of higher pretenders.

Honour is a noble atchievment, and the *royal
Preacher* against vanities, hath not only left it out
of that censure, but hath given it a particular
mark of his favour, (*Ecclef. vii. 1.*) *A good name
is better than precious ointment:* True honour in-
deed ought to be exempted from vanity; but
tho' he had the spirit of God, yet he could not
divine what would be the heraldry of our times.

Men have now a thousand new ways of getting
themselves a name, and raising a reputation. To
be the author of new vices, or new pleasures, shall
give a man a vogue and esteem in the world: To
be an impudent talking Atheist, shall give him
the name of a sagacious man: To be profane,
blasphemous

blasphemous or lascivious, shall give him the repute of a good and choice companion: To commit three or four murders, one after another, shall entitle him to matchless courage and an undaunted spirit: The eyes of all the fops shall be upon him, and their tongues ever sounding forth his praises and the history of his duels.

In a word, To be malicious, shall give the character of a great spirit; to be revengeful, of great courage and nice resentment; to be foppish and mimical, is to be witty; and to be sottish and good for nothing, will at least get the name of an honest-fellow, or one whom in abundant charity we are apt to excuse, by saying, that he is an enemy to none but himself. Nay, an entire and thorough pac'd debauchee, shall vaunt himself in his vices, and find companions enough to countenance, if not admire and imitate his dissolute practices; and so he thinks at least his reputation safe and secure, such as pleases others as well as himself.

But, contrary to our rule, we are got down into the filthy honour of the huffs and ruffians of the age; we will take it higher, and in a more cleanly sense; and yet still What is it but a vain pagantry? that only sets the man aloft, to be made the more ridiculous spectacle of vanity, to be exposed to publick view, and all his blots and failures to be discovered, which a lower condition would conceal or excuse.

If we examine him in his first rise, What poor and little expedients is the ambitious great-spirited man put upon to compass his designs? Could

we but see all the intrigues within his breast; how ridiculous a scene would there appear, and how often would it change? He must be popular, against all the sentiments of his reason, to comply with, and bring in, the senseless rabble: He must play the hypocrite in defiance to his conscience, to gain his equals and superiors; and sometimes in contradiction to both these methods, he must become a tyrant and an oppressor, or false and perfidious to others that stand in his way. In words and gestures, in visits and salutations, in smiles and grimaces, innumerable are the little fetches and shifts that he uses, to erect and set up a vain reputation, and make himself somebody in the world.

But when he is up, he hath as much ado to keep himself steady; and must, as occasion serves, use the same vain arts and devices, to guard his station from the assaults of his numerous enemies: For it is great odds but that the number of those that envy him and wish for his downfall, is greater still, than that of his admirers.

If at last, passing through the experience of all these follies, he shall become a wiseman; then he will reflect and become his own judge, and be condemned out of his own mouth: like the *royal wiseman* and *Preacher*, he may live to make invectives against his own vanities, and to discover that nothing under the Sun is to be exempted from that imputation.

But if he die without reproof from himself or others, or before a fall; yet doubtless the next discerning age shall find him out, and despise, or per-
haps

haps curse his memory and his grandeur : so that Honour will be found Vanity some time or other; *Data sunt ipsis quoque fata Sepulchris*: even the most durable monuments for reputation must at last crumble into dust. And one remarkable observation I cannot overlook, which shews how vain the world is in placing of honour: The person (howsoever deserving) that first raises his title to it, and a great estate to bear it forth, shall be upbraided with his former meanness and ignoble origine, and ever look'd upon with some contempt and diminution of his worth; whilst the last prodigal of the family he hath raised, who by his dissoluteness shall pull down the whole fabrick of his greatness, and throw his estate after it, shall be thought to have generous blood in his veins, and be reputed of honourable extraction; which, though it argues the injustice of a very partial and censorious age, doth yet confirm the vanity of ambition and a great name.

Now, if in such instances of his greatest grandeur, so vain a creature is man; What can we think of him in all other his wild extravagancies? When we view him haled and drag'd betwixt his sense and his reason; scuffling among his passions; sometimes gasping under the conflicts of love, and friendship, and then anon as frantically foming with hatred and revenge; sometimes in a fit of fondness and obliging civility, and then again as froward and reserv'd, he shall despise you, or, which is the same, he shall not know you: sometimes you have him as grave and morose as a fullen *Stoick*, and then again as airy and sop-

pish as a wanton Comedian. *David* acknowledges, *that he said in his haste, All men are liars.* Pf. cxvi. 11. He seems to check the severity of his censure by charging himself with the hasty pronounciation, but not at all to question the truth of it, And *St. Paul* is bold to affirm it without retractation: *Let God be true, but every man a liar.* Rom. iii. 4. The accusation will by no means be wip'd off in this more fashionable age, when an entire lie and dissimulation runs through the whole conversation of mankind; when friendship and enmity cannot be distinguish'd by any outward professions, or addresses, made or received; but those that think themselves the surest friends and most in favour shall often times see or hear the same high civilities and expressive assurances of kindness paid to others, whom, perhaps too but a little time before that salutation, they had heard treated with all manner of diminution and vile detraction. This is vanity with a witness. Alas! it appears in all manner of shapes, and passes by general allowance. By common education the man professes more than he can or ever designs to perform: by common politicks he must appear specious and brave, whate'er are his latent ill-qualities: the union of his heart and his tongue will but betray his simplicity: he flatters his enemies that they may not hurt him; and dares not be too obliging and grateful to his friends, lest they should come too near him and become troublesome; or lest he should seem to owe himself to them: so that all his artifice is to be exquisitely

ly vain; and all his accomplishment, to be inconsistent both with himself and others.

When he is in a low condition, then he creeps and cringes to all about him: How obliging and ready on all hands is he to offer his services? How highly doth he talk of the measures of friendship and gratitude? That wealth and greatness, have nothing in them of value and happiness, but as they are communicable, as they are better stations of doing good. But behold! when the man is up, he is as much another in his behaviour, as he is in his fortune; his talk and deportment are of a quite different strain. He concludes by the possession of his preferment, that worth and merits have clearly raised him, but inhumanly sentences others to meanness, and dullness, and unworthiness, because they are not in as good a station: he is therefore become haughty and imperious, brow-beats his friends and companions, produces reserves to his promised kindnesses, and so many limits and restraints from pretended justice or equity, or principles of self-preservation, in communicating his good, that in fine he doth none at all.

And yet again, if by the ascendancy of some malignant star he fall back to his former condition, or a worse, (for all the things he gapes after are vain and uncertain like himself) then how poorly and ridiculously doth he take up with his old cast-off virtues? The case is alter'd; he clamours against honour and greatness: would be very generous and charitable, if he had wherewithal: would be glad of the countenance of his old-despised

despised friends; and is become as humble and contemptible as his enemies can wish.

But because the text so expressly tells us, *that every man at his best estate is altogether vanity*; we will suppose the uninterrupted continuance of that best estate, without any preceding or intervening misfortune; if he never had the experience of a low condition, but from the beginning launched forth into large possessions and great honours; yet How visibly doth vanity grow upon him, and get the upper-hand of him? Surrounded with flatterers and wilful admirers, and never meeting with a seasonable check or reproof, or with some cross hits in the world, (of necessary use to make a wiseman), he often becomes wild and extravagant in all his discourses, and ever takes up the whole talk to himself: his natural parts, though at first capable of good improvement, give but the more voluble vent to his impertinence and folly: his actions, but especially his projectings, are always extraordinary, and still beyond the limits of common discretion; so that by habitual degrees, and mannerly allowance from those about him, he looses every grain of his prudence, gets the name of a fool with a great title and estate, and becomes no less than a monster of vanity. Thus, as holy *David* elsewhere observes, Psal. lxii. 9. *Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.*

But to do him justice, we will take him at his better advantages and higher pretences, his reason and religion: for his understanding (as wise as

it would seem) will act its part in this masquerade as well as his passions; and he doth not only thus play the fool with men, but vainly thinks to do so with him that will not be mocked. In the second place then,

II. We are to examine him as to his moral and divine estate, as he is the son and disciple of virtue, and wisdom, and religion; as he is guided by reason, and pretendedly govern'd by conscience; there too, he is vanity.

I. The original dignity of man above other creatures is, that he is endowed with a rational soul, a pure immaterial substance that cannot die or be extinguished; by this he claims kindred with the Angels, nay, a certain affinity to God himself, being created after his image, and cannot but think immortality essential to his very being; but alas! to invert the words of the Apostle, this immortal may put on mortality, and this incorruptible may put on corruption: He hath a true notion of his soul (thanks to Revelation); but for his reason, he hath so confounded it with his passions, that it is almost quite lost in the herd, and only his pride keeps up the distinction. So that this so divine faculty, by the conduct and management of so ill a master, is made subject to as much corruption, prejudice, vanity and imposition, as any sensual faculty whatsoever.

We know that man is not only out-done by many beasts of the earth in the exquisiteness of sense, and in many things that look like quicker perception; but in subtlety and innocence, in industry

dustry and providence, they are proposed to us as examples: and truly in temperance they do all upbraid us, the opposite vice proving us the more bestial in the worst sense.

Now, these would be very creditable effects of reason, and it is pity to lay it to the charge of that noble faculty, that man is so often delinquent in these common instances. A question may be raised hereupon, Whether the beasts exert or exercise these good qualities for want of reason, or men shew forth the very contrary, because they have wit and reason, and pretend to understand themselves? Truly, it looks suspicious as if reason did but act that pitiful scandalous office, as to light the candle, (for by that name it goes with the Wiseman, *Prov. xx. 27.*) to search out and put in practice those hidden vices, those mysteries of iniquity, which require subtlety and thinking, and which the poor brutal and sensual part of man would not be able to invent or discover.

The beasts of the earth, by the instinct of nature, do nothing against the common laws of nature; whilst man, by the help of his reason, knows better things, becomes a subtle casuist, and can make right and wrong, good and evil, change sides as he pleases: nay, he shall find out little (yet prevalent) arguments for the grossest sensuality; *Come, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we must die.* When he hath a mind to enjoy himself, by his sensual reason, he can easily argue all manner of libertinism into the precincts of natural right and human liberty, and thereby gratifies both
his

his lust and his vanity at the same time : though he wallows in sensuality like a beast, yet he thinks he comes off like a man, when he can shew a reason for his freedom and allowance in such dissolute enjoyments. So that this faculty, that should both distinguish and dignify the man, oft-times degrades him, and puts him in the lowest rank of animals ; only to keep up its reputation, finds out ways to make him more exquisitely and ingeniously vicious ; and it is counted no small glory in our age, to be both a witty and a rational sinner.

But if, again, this Reason chance to be nice and delicate, and nauseate such (more than bestial, that is, human) practices, then it oftentimes carries him to other, as vicious extremes ; makes him proud and insolent upon its presumption, sometimes a reasoning factious statesman, an arguing seditious politician ; or else instructs him in the arts and devices of ambition and covetousness ; and then he is vain and vicious too in a grave and creditable manner, as he thinks ; and hath the confidence, as well as vanity, of counting himself more subtle and rational, more prudent and politick, than any of his neighbours.

Now, though this indeed ought not to be called Reason, but lust and passion and prejudice, or by some other ill-name ; yet matter of fact is true ; and man, that rational animal, is thus carried away, Reason and all : If his rational faculty sleep or dote all this while, then he had as good be without it ; and he is but a vain pretender to Reason, that hath lost the use and exercise of it. And if
it

it be over-power'd or enslaved by lust and passion, then he makes but the more ridiculous shew and figure; he is merely beast-ridden, and the supreme noble faculty of the soul is made the villain or slave to the sensual appetites.

This and more is visible in the practice of the rational world; let us ascend higher to theory and speculation.

What we call true Reason, founded upon solid and immutable principles, alas! is a mere abstracted notion, the grand arcanum of intellectual science: that metaphysical philosopher's stone which several sects of wise men have sought after, and thought they have found, but it is airy and notional, and they do not hold it long; for another party arises, and explodes all their discoveries as vain and futile. It hath in all ages of the world been bandied from one philosopher to another; from *Plato* to *Aristotle*, and backwards again to *Epicurus*; and truly in this wiser (as pretended) and more adult age, it is by no means come to a fixed and determinate estate. So that what *Carneades* * was famous for long ago, the world in general puts in practice, and shews its subtlety and acuteness, in being able to dispute probably and rationally on all sides.

But we have little to do in our matters with the vanity of arts and sciences, we are rather to consider the vanity of Reason, and its exercise, in common conversation: And here we find it subject to that most notorious sort of vanity; it follows

* Cic. de Orat. lib. 2. Quintil. de Carn. lib. 12. c. 1. Plin. lib. 7. c. 30.

follows the fashions of the world; it changes with time and place; it is wedded to parties and factions: passion, prejudice and interest are its chief guides, and great incentives: and its foundation is sometimes education; sometimes an accidental and groundless inclination; sometimes a gainful place or employment, or the prospect of one; and sometimes a disappointment: sometimes the authority of a reverend master or teacher, or some great man and patron, from whom there is expectation; and then all reasoning must go on his side: and many times the will and resolution of the man that owns the reason; and then he takes up an opinion with vanity and affectation, and right or wrong defends it with zeal and vigour; and this he calls true Reason.

What was cried up for reason in the last age, is damn'd for treason or nonsense in this: and however immutable it may pretend to be, or really is in its own nature and genuine purity; yet we find in matter of fact that there are revolutions and changes in reason as well as in state. Nay, this vanity is not only visible in several men, which suppose several minds or reasons; but oftentimes as notorious in the same individual person: How eager and hot is he in defending this or that opinion, or cause, or interest? One would think the whole world should not be able to make him change his mind; yet on a sudden he is cool and remiss, and anon he is on the quite contrary side; and hath the impudence to shew as much zeal, and produce as many doubtful reasons in maintaining the opposite points: so that, to give it its due

due, Reason, though so subject to revolutions, hath ever had that wit and subtlety in all changes to fall upon its legs.

In a word, every vice hath its pretended reason: and every fancy and humour hath its reason: every interest is big with reason; and every faction swells and insults upon it. The revengeful man hath ever deep sense and reason on his side: and the oppressor hath always right and good reason in his cause: and the seditious hath ever reason and religion too for his plea. And the true reason of all is, what men love or desire, or (as we say) have a mind to; to that, they ever make it their business, to fit and square their reason and understanding. For, whereas in a natural and right method, the determinations of the understanding should precede the pursuit of the will; man, on the contrary, first loves*, and resolves to retain his error, and then sets himself to prove and defend it. And thus it comes about, that the fool amongst the rest hath his reason too, who *says in his heart, There is no God*: For the Atheist (who is that very same fool) doth in his heart or affections first desire †, or wish, there was no God, (for it would be a jolly time for him, if there were none) and then he erects his scheme with mighty flourish, which he calls arguments, as good as you can expect from a fool, but only powerful enough to do his own business.

2. But farther yet, if we venture a strain higher,
even

* *Vitia nostra, quia amamus, defendimus,*

† *Quod volumus, facile credimus.*

even to the best effects of reason; to the high-flown pretences of wisdom and learning, we shall make much the same discoveries. The wisdom of men is not only foolishness with God, but really in itself; and knowledge is as truly but science falsely so called. *Of making many books, says the Wiseman in his book of vanities, Eccl. Ch. xii. ver. 12. there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.* Nay, he ranks it with madness and folly, and makes it more than bare vanity, even vexation of spirit. *So ch. i. ver. 17, 18. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly; I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit: For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.* And the matter is plain enough; curiosity, that lust or concupiscence of the understanding, is never satisfied with any increase of knowledge, but is still uneasy and unquiet: And besides, what is discovered is still against us, and we find but the more fault with our beings: Our infirmities, our insufficiencies, and the narrowness of our intellects, come in order first to our view; for to know ourselves was ever accounted the first step to true wisdom; and this knowledge (if it be ever attain'd) besure must make such unpleasant discoveries, that the effect can be no less than vanity and vexation of spirit. But let us come to particulars, and we shall find many blots and stains, at least upon the face, that is, the pretences of wisdom and knowledge.

1. We may observe, That man with all eager curiosity and blustering diligence seeks after
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Wisdom;

Wisdom; and yet the mean while, or indeed beforehand, would make all the world believe, that he hath already attain'd it*; that he is by no means a fool, or so much as ignorant even of that, which he is studying to know. This is one vanity.

2. We may observe, That tho' one man murmurs that he hath not his due share in riches; another, that he hath not honour or preferment suitable to his merits; and every one, at some pretended failure of providence towards him: yet scarce any man all this while makes his complaint that he wants wisdom and knowledge (at least enough to serve his turn) or parts sufficient to acquire it. Every one is well enough satisfied with his portion in this case; and yet for all this, it is truly enough observed, that far the greatest part of mankind is really under-witted. This is also vanity. Again

3. We may observe, That, so various are the tracts or paths of knowledge, that a man wants still a higher understanding to inform him whether he is in a right one; so that scepticism || (or that *Nothing is known*) must be the unavoidable result of all his study and labour. *Aristotle* in his *Ethicks* asserts, "That one man will conceive himself as certain of his error, as another shall be of his true knowledge; and *Crysippus* † used to make his boast, That many times he wanted opinions to advance, but if once he started the opinion,

* Multi ad Sapientiam pervenissent, nisi se jam pervenisse putassent.

|| Nil scitur.

† Diog. Laert. in Crysip.

opinion, he never wanted arguments to defend it." And *Protagoras*, another bravado in philosophy, would be thought famous, for making the better cause seem the worse, and the worse the better. This is altogether vanity.

4. We may more seriously observe, That when a man hath made the best or most of his wisdom and knowledge; he hath then but the better prospect of his own ignorance: and it is one testimony, that he hath made his entrance into the school of wisdom, when he can discover the due dimensions of his own folly, and what a vast circuit of knowledge there is still out of his ken. And here the Wiseman again helps us out, Eccle. viii. 16, 17. *When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth; (for also there is, that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes) then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further, though a wiseman think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it: Though he pore and study day and night, and seeth no sleep with his eyes, yet is he never the nearer; for he is confounded, poor man! at his first setting forth, and the nearest objects of his senses, are the most mysterious subjects of his understanding: Hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, says Solomon again in his book of Wisdom, chap. ix. 16. and with labour do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven who hath searched out? Those glorious luminaries*

that furround and enlighten us, are themselves most obscure phænomena; and man hath got no further in the discovery and explication of them, than guess and supposition. Thus are his proficiencies so mean and dull in sound knowledge, that he seems reprobated to an obstinate and invincible ignorance, in the daily objects both of sense and contemplation: so that his highest pretences to science are the most notorious indications of his folly and vanity. We need instance no farther from home, than in his own rational soul, which is the spring of all his pretended knowledge, and yet itself one of the most inscrutable mysteries. There are thousands of opinions of its nature and origine; and he that called it *Entelecheia* *, spoke like an oracle, that is, mystically, because he knew not how to determine. The Christian speaks the fullest, and most to purpose, when he calls it, "the image of God; but that God is himself incomprehensible and the profoundest of all mysteries." And every one knows that way of arguing † or enquiring is most distant from the rule and path of true knowledge: *For clouds and darkness are round about him; but righteousness and judgment, (where our knowledge may be conversant with better success) are the habitation of his throne; and the highest ascendancy of our understandings.*

5. But lastly, The likeliest pretences to wisdom lay amongst the Moralists, and particularly the *Stoicks*, the foundation of which consisted in bearing

* Arist. *Ἐντελέχεια*, vox Barbara & ambigua, *Comments*.

† Ignotum per ignotius.

ing all evils and difficulties with a hardy courage and resolution, and standing stiff and unconcern'd at all the cross and vexatious accidents of the world; upon which bravery they chiefly founded their *summum bonum*, the only inviolate felicity that was attainable in this life. And yet for all this, with respect to their notion be it spoken, there is a certain fool-hardiness that will arise to the same pitch: and a man (if we may call him so) that hath not a grain of their wisdom or philosophy, shall by the dint of his dulness, or his conceitedness stand proof and bluff against all affronts and disappointments whatsoever; and carry off an adverse fortune as well as the best philosopher of 'em all.

We are now to pass to the highest and most creditable pretences of man; his profession of religion; surely no vanity can stick to that!

Our reason doth not so much distinguish or dignify us, but we know that in some both abilities and operations, that look like rational, we are out-done by the beasts of the earth. But religion is the sole distinguishing character: and if reason makes us like the Angels; this raises us to the image and likeness of God.

Religion, in its due and genuine profession and practice, is the only sovereign preservative against vanity, but as men have the handling and modifying of it, and commonly use the best things worst, they have made it the top vanity or very may-pole in the whole show. Here are *ὑπεροχὰ μαλαίωσις* * the heights of vanity. It would be

* 2 Peter ii. 18.

a history too large for the bounds of this Discourse, to attempt a full account of religious extravagancies, which were greater instances of vanity than are to be discovered in any other of the affairs or transactions of mankind.

We are told great matters of natural religion, and of an innate principle in the first discovery of a God: but if men did so readily find him out by natural light and reason, they soon lost him in the rubbish of idolatry; and one would think they lost all their reason too, when any thing would serve them for a God; a well-carv'd image was a creditable one; nay, what afforded but a kind shade to their bodies, or a savory relish to their tastes, had an immediate Apotheosis.

The wise *Chaldeans*, *Egyptians*, *Greeks* and *Romans*, from whom we have most of our learning and arts, were as silly and superstitious in their religion as now are the wild *Indians*, whom we take to be but very little above the degree of brutes. The *Romans* pretended to the highest improvements both in knowledge and reformed worship, yet *Varro* says, the number of their Gods exceeded thirty thousand: and this is the product of nature in finding out religion. It would be a strange sight to see a committee of Senators rise from their politick debates, and go out and gravely observe the pickings of birds and entrails of beasts, and then return with their answer upon the question, whether auspicious for good or evil, and, by that vote, govern the state for a whole year.

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These practices of superstition and idolatry may seem to deserve a severer name and imputation than that of *vanity*, but it is that they generally go by, in the prophets, and in all the holy writers. In innumerable places* of Scripture, when God complains of the idolatries of his people, it is expressed by *provoking him to anger with their vanities*. And indeed it is not an excusable degree, but the height of impiety; when all is nought and wholly corrupted, then it is called *vanity*; when mischief and iniquity come to the height, then the product is *vanity*; and when we are redeemed from all that is vile and sinful and destructive, then are we said to be redeemed from a *vain-conversation*.

It is a great argument both for the truth and necessity of that revealed religion we have from heaven, that mankind was almost lost and swallowed up in the vanity of human inventions relating to the worship of God: there was need of a hand out of the clouds to point out to them the right way; man having given sufficient testimony that he could not invent such a religion as we have received by divine revelation; for every human model of that nature was ever most ridiculously vain as well as impious.

The *Jewish* religion therefore came from God, and, to take off all imputation of vanity, it was designedly mixed with types and shadows of some-

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* Deut. xxxii. 21. 1 Kings xvi. 13. 2 Kings xvii. 15. Isa. xlv. 9. Jer. viii. 15. Chap. xvi. 19. Chap. xviii. 15. 1 Sam. xii. 21. Acts xiv. 15. Job xv. 35. Psal. x. 7. Prov. xxii. 8. 1 Pet. i. 18.

thing more substantial and glorious that was to come; in some indifferent and allowable instances too it was permitted to bear some resemblance with the neighbouring religions; God in kind condescension using that compliance for the hardness of their hearts, that is, for the weakness and giddiness of their temper. But all was founded upon great reason, and bore a rational and necessary relation to the completion and substance, which was Christ and his religion to be revealed in the fullness of time; all sacrifices typifying that one all-sufficient sacrifice that was to be made for the sins of the whole world.

Yet this revealed religion so well founded, and attested too by undeniable miracles, was, by the *Jew's* usage of it, turned into the most ridiculous mockery: And the *Gentiles* with all their vain superstition and idolatry had ever the better of them in the railery that passed between them: For in truth they had as many Vanities about their one God and his worship, as the Heathens about their thousands.

Their sabbath, tho' an holy and rational institution, they had so perverted from its prime and designed intent and use, that it became the reproach of them and their God; so the Poet derides them,

* *Sabbata Sancta colunt veteri damnata veterno,
Tanquam lassati mollis imago Dei.*

Reflecting upon their sabbath (as they observ'd it) as the emblem of a lazy or wearied deity.
They

* Rutilius Claudius Itiner. lib. 1.

They would sometimes chuse rather to die under the enemy's sword, than fight or defend themselves on that day; and run the venture of making a disease or wound mortal by delay, than attempt the cure on the Sabbath: Holy acts and works of mercy, must be superseded by a holy-day; and Christ himself could not undeceive them in these and other wild conceptions and gross vanities.

They were happy in the Scriptures, the revealed will of God, and to give them their due, they preserved them with great zeal and carefulness; and so far we are beholden to their superstition and vanity, if it ever could produce good effects; they rever'd every letter; they counted the letters of the Pentateuch, and with wonderful pains and very needless accuracy they trifled away their time, and vainly spent their divinity and profound learning, in finding out which was the letter that stood in the midst of each book, and upon that they made many foolish remarks: but for all this their devotion to the letter, any interpretation was more acceptable to them than that which was literal; and after all, they raised their Oral Tradition, above their Scriptures, and then absurdly turn'd it into a *Talmud*, that is, oral tradition or unwritten law, into a Scripture or writing.

In millions of vanities, notorious in their writings and practices, they drove their religion instituted of God into mere superstition; as our Saviour * charges them from the Prophet *Isaiah*, *In vain do they*

* Mat. xv. 9. Mark vii. 7. Isa. xxix. 13.

they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men; till like the brazen serpent, it was necessary, the whole institution, as to all outward observances and formalities, should be destroy'd as an idol: And in fullness of time and full measure of their iniquities they became executioners both of that and of themselves; when the *Romans* were at their gates, every sect was doing the enemy's business within the walls, and the Zealots with their turbulent and factious religion destroy'd more numbers, and with greater barbarity, than the *Roman Army* would have done with their swords. And now they stand distinct, and separated in the world, wandering among other nations, under the curse of *Cain*, and marks of divine vengeance, as an unanswerable argument for the Christian religion: Because here amongst us, through the whole Christian world, are the accursed of God, that first refused and then crucified their Messias, the Lord of life and salvation; as standing witnesses against themselves, and for him whom they pierced.

But, what is still more deplorable, so reprobated is the world in vanity, that even the Christian religion, tho' the highest and most refined reformation, hath not clear'd us of it; nay, itself hath been made subject to it, like the creature, by the ill usage of men. Altho' settled upon the most solid foundations of reason and truth, yet every party of professors have had their vain superstructures; heresies and schisms must come, and with them all variety of vanity. The Apostles
fell

fell out about little matters, and dared * one another to the face, on that point of reformation, which was a vanity to make a question of, Whether the shadows and mere trifles of the Levitical law should be kept up and observ'd, when the substance was come.

The first fathers of the church came nearest the Apostles in purity of doctrine and exemplary life, yet those of the greatest credit among them, as *Justin Martyr*, *Tertullian*, *Lactantius*, and many others, were fond of that vain dream and fanciful persuasion of Christ's reigning a thousand years in a fine new *Jerusalem* made up in an instant of gems and precious stones.

The eastern and western churches fell foul upon one another, about the observation of an holy-day, with what respect to the moon *Easter* should be fixed, and damn'd one another with their thundering Anathemaes, as if heaven had interess'd itself in so vain and frivolous a contention. Another pedantick controversy was about a word, or indeed a single letter, whether *ὁμοούσιος* or *ὁμοιούσιος* was the more orthodox term to express the consubstantiality of God the Father and God the Son. And what fury was there between the *Latin* and *Greek* Church, upon a vain and trifling contest, whether *Filiog*; should be admitted into, or turned out of their Creed? And more than vain, even cruel and unmerciful, are some of the *Romish* writers † in their censures upon this

* Gal. ii. 17.

† Bellarm. de Christ. lib. 2. c. 30. & in Chronol. ad calcem libr. de Script. Gretser defens. Bell. Aliiq; plures.

this matter, who say, that for their obstinate refusal to admit the aforesaid word *Filioq*; God soon after suffered them to fall under the miserable slavery of the *Turkish* yoke, and at last *Constantinople*, (the seat of their Church and Empire) to be taken by *Mahomet* the II^d. on the very festival of *Whitsuntide*, the solemn time peculiarly dedicated to the honour of the Holy Ghost. So impiously vain are superstitious or credulous people, especially *Popish* believers, that they are ever and anon bringing down extraordinary providence from heaven to avouch their peevish injunctions, and countenance their malice.

Ceremony and outside profession hath been all the religion that hath been seen in the world for many centuries; and, to mend the matter, others have strip'd it of all manner of seemly dress, to make the antick the more ridiculous.

Some have called Councils to correct abuses, and then established them; and others have called Synods to determine that which at first view is as far out of their possible knowledge as the world in the moon. Latter councils are justly blamed for not admitting the Reformed to plead their own cause; and some that have reproached them, call a Synod at *Dort*, and not only reject the ingenious and honest Remonstrants, from being judges or parties co-ordinate with them, but summon them as delinquents and prisoners to the bar of their *Sanedrim*. But these vanities and idle practices about religion, nothing relating to true Christianity, but the mock-profession of it, I have only time to touch upon, and no more is necessary.

necessary. The vanities that most nearly concern us lie in religious practice; and the grand one of all is the vanity of our whole profession, That our manners so little comport with it: That men shall lift themselves under the religion of Christ Jesus, which hath all peace in its nature, essence, institution and universal design, imply'd in every precept, and avouched by the comportment of the first establishers and publishers of it; and yet they that are highest in the profession of it shall make it the pretence for all factions, seditions, commotions, inhuman cruelties and massacres; and commonly the greater villainy, the greater hath been the pretext of zeal; nay, under the pretence of defending and securing the profession of pure and harmless Christianity, men shall break all the bonds of peace, and trample down all the boundaries of faith, mercy and righteousness.

If we would call all the strict obligations of religion by one name, it cannot be by a more comprehensive one than that of *conscience*: and what variety of antick parts hath *that* acted in the world? If arms be taken up in a bloody (especially in a civil) war, ask both sides, and they pretend conscience; and ever most highly so, the first assailants, the factious and most turbulent party. If a schismatick refuses communion, and then falls to railing and raving, it is all for *conscience* sake: suspicion and jealousy, discontent and rebellion, alas! have nothing in them relating to ill-nature or an ungovernable temper, but all are *conscience*; nay, every fancy or fond persuasion must have that Christian-name. Altho' the

the rise of its tenderness is commonly some remarkable prejudice or disappointment, a falling-out with the Church, or a pique against some minister of it, obligations or expectations from the factious party, or an eye upon trading with them. A thousand causes, or little provocatives, shall administer sufficient occasion.

And this conscience, so vain and desultory as we have made it, must be the sovereign despotick guide of all our actions: the God within us, *Βεβηλοῖς ἀπασι συνέδησις Θεὸς : δικαῖος φύλαξ.* The *Lares* or household God: our *Συνήρησις*, our great safety and conservation. This must be superior to all rule and reason; and passive-obedience or non-resistance to all its dictates and suggestions, is thought an indication of a tender, sober and religious temper; when all this while no reflection or consideration is made, by what steps and measures the man hath cherished and fomented an ugly humour, and at last arrived to the fancy and vanity of esteeming it his *conscience*, or at least calling it by that name.

But farther, If we come to duty, how vain are we, and beside the purpose of true godliness? The *opus operatum* is that we all are apt to acquiesce in. A Sermon, if it rightly strike upon the passions, (as noise, if it be aptly modified, will naturally do) then is it a complete piece of devotion, and the man is wonderfully edified and satisfied, and looks no farther; commends the discourse, but really mends his life no faster after that good Sermon, than after that he calls by another name. At his prayers he is oft-times so nice,

that

that good petitions, if they are written down in a book are nauseous to him; but if fresh-coin'd out of the mint of invention, then they cause sighs and groans, and make the heart sad for the present; but there the whole devotion ends, no endeavours are used to obtain those mercies he prays for, or forsake those sins he hath prayed against: only he goes under the name of one that loves good preaching and good praying, and that's enough to make a Saint: And all the rest of his zeal is spent in talking for the party, in malicious surmises about the times, and in a staunch and separate behaviour and conversation. But there is nothing all this while of the substance of holiness, mortifying the lusts and passions, humility and peaceableness, giving of alms and other good works; so that all that he doth is at best or most in order to that good life, that he is never likely to engage in, or set about.

Partiality in duties, and partiality toward our sins, is the habitual vanity of our religion: how can we imagine it acceptable to a most wise all discerning God, when we are so fickle and inconsistent, that there is no business in the world we pass over with greater flight and disregard? We lift up our hands and eyes to God in prayer, whilst our hearts are looking another way, intense upon quite different matters, but surely, says *Job*, *God will not bear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it.* (chap. xxxv. ver. 13.) We make daily profession of our Faith, and that there is a judgment to come, but never prepare for our trial, and yet are startled at the approach or apprehension

on of the most unlikely evil that may befall our bodies. What horror doth seem to arise at the sins of swearing and drunkenness, very lewd and most insufferable crimes? And yet how many mincing apologies are made for rebellion, for revenge, for covetousness, which run through the whole course of some mens lives, and the acts or designs of them are never respited or interrupted?

In prosperity, what vanity and lightness, what coldness and dullness, in all the duties of devotion? But if a calamity comes, or is near at hand; then none but God is our friend and deliverer. Should we not look upon that fellow as a very pitiful abject wretch, who goes by our doors with scorn and contempt, and sometimes with affront; but want pinches him, or he needs our relief or advice, and then comes whining with all manner of nauseous obeisance to beg our favour and charitable assistance.

Supposing we have sometimes a serious fit of devotion, yet observe the vanity of it, our religion and lusts play the parts of *Castor* and *Pollux*, rise and set by turns: sometimes we shall see the man wallowing in all manner of sensuality, regardless and supine; and then anon falling into a melancholy quailm of repentance, but then again as soon as a fresh temptation offers, and his appetites are up, repentance vanishes, and he returns to his freedoms and brutish pleasures: and all the hopes he can have (and they as vain as his whole conversation) must be, that after these changes of sinning and repenting, resolution and irresolution, his repentance will have the good luck to appear
last

last upon the stage, and so closing all with a whining or groaning Epilogue upon his death-bed, and faintly reaching out for the prayers of the Priest and his good neighbours, (the first time perhaps he gave either of them a kind aspect or a good word) he goes off with acclamation; he is happy, and gone to a better place. But,

III. We have but little time to finish the last general point I have engaged to discourse upon, and indeed it will require but little, *viz.* How to fix upon a state and condition of life, really the best, and the only one not subject to vanity: easy, and in few words to be discovered, in contemplation at least, tho' experience hath prov'd the practice to be very rare and difficult.

The Preacher, after his long Sermon of Vanity, makes short work of this subject; (it is an honour to imitate him) he sums up all in the two last verses of his book of *Ecclesiastes*, or the Preacher, *viz. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil:* The *first* of which relates to the means, the fear of God, implying all duties consequential to a true godly fear. And the *second* to the end, the account that must be given for the things done in the body at the day of judgment.

He is certainly most clear and exempt from vanity in his actings, who uses the best and most proper means, and directs them to the best and noblest end.

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Now you know, that both *David* and *Solomon* do call the practice of Religion and moral Virtue by the name of Wisdom and Understanding; and that upon a very obvious reason: That he is most certainly the wisest man (and the Heathen moralists ever thought the same) who governs his lusts and passions to make himself quiet and happy here, and squares his life according to the exactest rules of virtue and piety, that his soul may be in peace and happiness in the next world, upon a belief, or if it be no more than a probability, that it is immortal; because to do this is the wisest course of life, and the main and prime business he has to do, and for which he was sent into this world. No man can be charged with vanity, whilst he keeps close to his proper employment.

We usually pronounce upon a man, that he is vain and ridiculous, when little and trifling matters take up his whole time and business; will not the censure hold against him who employs all his time, all the powers of his wisdom and industry, to compass that which can never satisfy his mind or fill his desires; (or if it doth for the present, it can never hold long, the desires and objects will be ever and anon falling out, and a little time quite part them one from another) but all this while never minds the conclusion of the whole matter; fearing God and keeping his commandments, by which he may secure the interest of soul and body for ever, and in no wise neglect the true interest of this present life?

If we should meet and confer together, and discourse this great point one with another in the
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next world, some little space before our trial comes on at that great tribunal of God; what, I pray, would you call wisdom? What would you call exemption from vanity and folly? Be sure not that, by which in the preceding world we got a great estate; for alas! that is quite gone and lost to us and our posterity, nothing of that nature can escape the general conflagration: No! nor that, by which we once got fame and renown, for that is vanished too, and perhaps is really glorious and base in the esteem of all at that day; for then be sure our judgments will be more discerning, and we shall have other thoughts and apprehensions of things: No! nor that by which we attained to arts and sciences, were states-men or politicians; for we shall have no manner of use of them, neither in heaven nor in hell; they will seem but the greater vanities, all cunning devices will be open and exposed, and so become the more contemptible; we shall wonder and lament that so much time and labour hath been spent upon them. Our knowledge must then be of another nature, of much greater perfection, or we cannot be happy; and sinners too the more sagacious and discerning they then become, the more fitted and qualified (as we may say) will they be for their due punishment; their remorse and torments will be the sorer and more pungent. We shall infallibly then pronounce upon the debate, That we were altogether vain in the other world, and that That was the truest wisdom, which exerted itself in all the provisionary means for this great and terrible day of judgment, to secure the grand interest of everlasting life.

The dignity of the means and of the end ennobles all labours, and all employment of time. Now Christianity is the means, and everlasting happiness the end. And this Christianity is the practice of the most refined virtue, contains the best rules, and best authority, and best encouragement for that practice, exclusive of all vanity and hypocrisy. And, beyond all this, we have assurance by a rational and well-grounded Faith, through the merits and satisfaction of a Saviour who was of infinite sufficiency to atone the infinite justice of God in our behalf, that this virtue and holiness shall be crowned with glory, and everlastingly rewarded; our guilt shall be done away, and the imperfections in our righteousness shall be made whole and accepted with God through the Righteousness of his son Jesus Christ. All religions must be vain in comparison to the Christian, which hath so sure a foundation, such divine even the only possible means of pleasing God, and so noble a prize; here no vanity can be affixed.

The *Atheist* with an hypocritical pretext of humility objects, That it is vanity and pride which makes men fancifully believe that they are such estimable beings in the sight of God, as to be designed for such glorious advancement in the next world. But it is quite otherwise with Christians; we are humble by all the injunctions of our religion, we acknowledge ourselves vile, and that we are the unworthiest of all God's creatures, and could have no pretence for our belief of such great things, no such fond persuasion of a crown
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of glory, but that we have an assurance founded upon almighty miracles, all undeniable evidences, that we have a Saviour the Son of God, who hath exalted our natures, and by his infinite merits hath made our sincere tho' imperfect obedience capable of laying a certain claim to an eternal crown of glory, which God the righteous judge shall give (as in righteousness due for his Son's sake, and by virtue of his covenant of grace) to all those that love his appearing, that have liv'd according to his example and precepts, which are the indispensable conditions of salvation.

Therefore our religion in its right faith and genuine practice cannot be subject to Vanity. St. James calls *Faith without works* a vain religion, (Ch. i. ver. 26. ii. 20.) and it would be the height of Vanity, if we had not a Saviour to dignify both our faith and works, and likewise, if a good life and conversation were not absolutely necessary to qualify us for all that Christ hath done and purchased for us.

Let us then fix here, and be wise unto salvation; let us strictly keep to our baptismal vow, renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; let our chief regard be to the chief business of our lives, and that will be wisdom without a blemish; let us not spend our years in vanity, as a tale that is told, in matters of as little weight and consideration; let us not *walk in a vain shadow, nor disquiet ourselves in vain*; let us not foolishly labour for the things that perish, but for those that shall endure unto everlasting life.

Amen.

SERMON V.

*Of Righteousness, Temperance, and
Judgment to come.*

ACTS XXIV. 25.

And as he reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled.

ST. Paul, though under the mean and dejecting circumstances of a prisoner, bore down by the violence of all about him, being admitted to speak for himself, proves too hard both for his accusers and for the judge.

First, He baffles the famous orator *Tertullus*, who thought by his glavering eloquence to have made sure of the Governor; as you read in the beginning of this chapter.

And *Ananias* the High-priest, and the Elders (those perjur'd evidences) were as easily confuted. Though so closely beset by an Heathen lawyer, and a Jewish priest, with a pack of elders (a rank of men that had been infamous upon record for false-

false-witnessing,) yet were they all confounded by his closer reasonings in the vindication of himself and his religion.

The depositions against him were no less than high-treason and sacrilege, sedition in the government, and prophaning the temple; as appears by his defence, *ver.* 12, 18. And at another hearing, *chap.* xxv. *ver.* 8. he pleads again: "Neither against the law of the *Jews*, neither against the temple, nor yet against *Cæsar*, have I offended any thing at all."

No less than church and state were to be tumbled down by this poor Christian, but it seems nothing but reason and religion were his all and only weapons and instruments of assault and battery. They would have thought themselves secure, had they but understood the nature and constitution of that religion, which was never design'd to bring any disturbance to the established governments of the world.

After the witnesses and the famous orator, the governour himself is choak'd and confounded by the dint of his reasonings, *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.*

The conscious judge was not able to bear up against the rational prisoner: the bench receiv'd sentence from the bar, and judgment was pronounced; a judgment to come! at a distance indeed, yet more dreadful to every rational apprehension than all the dismal proceedings of human judgments that shall fall between.

No doubt but his discourse (tho' undoubtedly

managed with great manners and prudence) was applicable to the peculiar crimes of the governor; as appears by the account we have of his life.

Upon these three topicks the rational Apostle touched him to the quick, being notoriously habituated in the contrary vices of injustice and lewdness, and be sure, for that reason, an *Atheist* at large, one that did not believe future rewards and punishments; never thought of a judgment to come, when all things must be examined with such exact scrutiny and enquiry, that what hath escaped in this world, shall not elude that grand inquest. A thought that might cast the greatest champion in vice into a fit of trembling; but it seems it was soon over with *Felix*; for we find in the following *verse* to the Text, he was hankering after a bribe, the most pestilent design of obstructing justice, and the greatest reproach to a government.

Tacitus * speaks more at large of his unrighteous practices, that, *per omnem severitiam & libidinem jus regium servili ingenio exercuit*. ---- That he was a tyrant, cruel and arbitrary, basely enslaving those that were under him: and a gross instance against the virtue of Temperance is inserted by the same author (*Antonii & Cleopatra nepte in matrimonium acceptâ*) that he took to wife the niece of *Antony* and *Cleopatra*, whom *Josephus* declares to be another man's, viz. the wife of *Azis* king of the *Emisseni*, from whom it is said he stole her by the help of a magician.

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Had he been threatned with an impeachment before *Cæsar* for his male-administration, his trembling might probably have lasted longer; this was but a short surprize, as is evident from the following course of his life. And yet was he startled to hear of a tribunal, tho' he did but faintly believe it, for there all must come out; and a considering man would have forbore those hellish vices upon the probability or bare possibility of such a future judgment. But it is time to come to the words of the text, which contain in them,

I. The frame and method of the Discourse in general, which was by way of reasoning.

II. The subject matter upon those three Topics. 1. *Righteousness*, 2. *Temperance*, 3. *Judgment to come*.

I. From the Discourse in general we may raise these following observations. As

1. The necessity and prevalence of divine reasonings; not *Tertullus* the famous orator, but *Paul* the persecuted despicable Christian, a rational believer of revelation, had almost converted an Infidel magistrate, and brought him over to his own persuasion.

Reason may be insufficient to give an explanatory account of divine mysteries; but to *Atheists* and unbelievers Reason must be made use of, to warrant the revelation of those mysteries: for though we have reason to believe (founded upon the

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the certainty of the revelation) what may be beyond the reach of our reason to comprehend; yet we have this security, that nothing can be imposed upon our Faith, which is contradictory to the principles of our Reason.

Reasoning we find was St. *Paul's* method in all his discourses: the ground work was Reason, and upon that he erected the authority of Revelation; that is, proved the truth and certainty of this new revelation by Jesus Christ, upon the most persuasive and powerful arguments of reason. Acts xvii. 2. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, (a synagogue of the Jews at Thessalonica) and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures:* And again chap. xviii. 4. *it is said he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.* And Ver. 19. *He came to Ephesus, and entred into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.*

It is down-right enthusiasm, which is next to madness, to talk of Revelation without laying down arguments from Reason, why we should believe that Revelation; or to prescribe a religion from heaven, obliging upon an eternal penalty, without producing rational motives to believe that it came from thence.

Nay, it would still look suspicious, if it could not be made out by Reason that this religion and divine worship is also suitable to the nature and essence of God, taking in the practice of all moral virtues; and therefore must be acceptable to him above any other, if he doth require and is delighted with the homage and service of mankind.

kind. On the contrary, the heathen religion must be nauseous and provoking in the sight of the true God, and many of the doctrines and much of the worship of the Church of *Rome* are as incompatible and indefensible; because they are founded upon no revelation, which is the prime reason of all to warrant belief; and are also almost contradictory to the pure nature and essence and all the attributes of God.

2. We may observe again in vindication of Reason, that St. *Paul* made a rational solid Discourse upon a moral subject: upon two of the four cardinal virtues, Justice and Temperance: the other two might not be so much to his present purpose; Prudence and Fortitude, perhaps *Felix* had not so directly offended against.

Our Apostle hath given us a very good example, set us a good pattern, to recommend moral honesty and goodness.

Some think nothing fit to come from this place, but amusing perplexing Discourses, to keep up a mistaken devotion, and not at all for true edification, or rational conviction; subjects that have foundation neither in reason nor religion; whilst morality and honest behaviour are flat and insipid Divinity, because indeed most intelligible, most close to the purpose, and most personal to the auditors.

Religion, and most eminently the Christian, was principally design'd by heaven to retain us in righteousness one towards another, and in temperance towards ourselves, that we may be orderly and regular in the station wherein God by his
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providence hath placed us; and thereby made fitter for a higher, to which he hath promised in right of his Son to advance us.

We need not question the favour of heaven, if we behave ourselves soberly and righteously upon earth. Indeed all the heights of honour and devotion are to be paid to God; but alas! what do they amount to in real value and worth? No advantage or emolument to God, who wants them not, and though indispensably necessary both as commanded, and as in nature and reason we stand obliged to our Almighty Creator and Redeemer, yet they cannot make any substantial accession to that honour, which is already infinite; and they do fall short of any merit.

What therefore is within our reach and attainment, and most suitable to our beings, is the main business of our religion, *viz.* sobriety and temperance, to keep ourselves clean at home; and justice or righteousness, to keep us honest in our dealings abroad. And this fits religion to the secular government and order of the world; and makes it not only of use to secure happiness in the next life, but in this also, to lay the foundation of it by peace and quietness. But

3. We must observe and conclude too upon the side of religion, in some opposition to reason, That the bare talking of moral virtues, of their genuine congruity and agreeableness to human nature, and the felicity there is in their practice, a present and sufficient reward, according to the flights of the *Stoicks*; as likewise the bare declaiming against the opposite vices, as base and

and destructive to our beings, and vexatious in or soon after the enjoyment, are altogether insufficient topicks (how rationally soever urged) to make impression upon mankind so impetuously bent upon lust and passion, present gain and pleasure. It must be the application of future rewards and punishments, the revelation of a judgment to come, that must strike those discourses home to the soul.

Reasoning for virtue and against vice, may make a man consider, who has pretty good natural inclinations, and is already byassed towards goodness. But the eye to the recompence of reward, and to the terror of future judgment, which must pass by the sentence of an all-knowing and all-powerful God, who is infinite in mercy to reward, and a consuming fire to execute vengeance, must awe and fear him into a good life: *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord,* says our Apostle upon this very subject, *we persuade men.*

4. We must observe again in respect to religion and its greater influences above Reason, That how mighty soever are the powers of Reason, even back'd with the application of revealed truths; and how great a fit of trembling soever may be raised thereupon; yet, if the grace of God do not fall in, and complete the work in the person to be convinced or converted, the business is by no means done. *St. Paul* may reason his heart out, and *Felix* may tremble his heart out; but all this while there was no true effectual conversion: for in the verse of the Text, he was for
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dismissing the rational prisoner, he was tired of his monitor. *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee:* and in the next verse, he was presently upon his old unrighteous dealing; hoping that the poor prisoner would give him money for his liberty. This was all the Christianity *Felix* attain'd to: a fit of trembling, a little disorder relating to some guilty passages of his life, upon the doleful sound of a judgment to come; and truly as much as can be expected, without the concurrence of God's grace.

Such another demi-convert was *Agrippa*, chap. xxvi. ver. 28. who complimented our Apostle's way of reasoning so far as to say, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* But we never heard more of the Christianity or good morals of either of them, either in Heathen or Christian story. So that *Paul* may plant and water too, but God must give the increase; make his reasonings successful and fruitful by his own grace and holy Spirit.

Thus far of what arises from the nature and method of his Discourse in general, which was by way of Reasoning. We are now to handle the particular subjects by themselves, which in respect to so honourable as well as judicious an auditory, I ought to dispatch with all the brevity is possible. And

I. Of Righteousness and its opposite vice.

It was not *St. Paul's* subject, and in justice to the Text it ought not to be mine, to take in all the acceptations of the word *Righteousness*, particularly

ticularly those before or since contained in the Holy Scriptures, which are very numerous: and it had been but a precarious argument to have urged any thing from thence to an Infidel. He reasoned no doubt upon common moral righteousness or justice, *viz.* doing of right and abstaining from injury, according to the plain position of St. John: *he that doth righteousness is righteous as Christ is righteous*; and our Lord's golden rule was a maxim of nature founded upon the eternal laws of justice; of *doing to others, as we would they should do unto us.*

There is no question then but St. Paul discoursed upon the common boundaries of right and wrong. It is probable too, upon the particular obligations that lay upon Magistrates, and those that were in authority, to do judgment and righteousness; or they would be more signally punished by the hands of God than common offenders; as there were many remarkable instances in those times of the vengeance of heaven upon Emperors and other subordinate Governors, that were tyrannical, cruel, and oppressive. However unaccountable they may be to their people, a severe one must one day be given before the supreme tribunal of heaven, before the Lord, when he cometh to judge the earth; *He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.* Psal. xcvi. 13. But the rights of *Cæsar*, and those that are in authority under him, belong not to our province.

Righteousness is both morally and christianly obliging upon us all; and so necessary to human

man societies, that they cannot be preserved without it: *Righteousness exalteth a nation*, says Solomon, Prov. xiv. 34. And the whole world must fall into its old chaos and confusion, if the boundaries of justice be thrown down or destroy'd. Therefore surely it can be no made virtue, depending purely upon positive laws; but itself, a law and dictate of nature. And tho' some have dream'd of a first state of nature, where there were no bounds of right and wrong, but all things thrown out in common as a prey and prize to the strongest and most ravenous, which they rightly call a state of war: Yet surely since mankind could not subsist long in such a state of confusion, what was primarily necessary for their preservation, must needs be of natural obligation: therefore all obligations to righteous dealing between man and man, must be as early as our very beings, because they could not subsist, or be preserv'd without them.

That fundamental rule of All Righteousness, of doing to others, as we would they should do unto us, could not surely escape the thought of every reasoning man, in this first state of nature; that is, arguing thus: "I would not be over-powered by another man, nor dispossessed of what I have in present possession, because he hath the accidents of greater strength or power; and therefore, in natural equity, I ought not to do the like to that man, or any other, if I should come to be in those superior circumstances." So then, if men are born with rational faculties, or what surely is inseparable from their beings, with humanity,

manity, this obligation must lie upon them by the light of nature; although not with force and restraint enough, till positive laws were made with severe penalties to correct all wild excursions and deviations that may be made from the natural law of Righteousness. Therefore the sanctions of civil societies were necessary to raise justice to a greater strictness in practice and execution: and the positive laws of God have extended these obligations to all the nicer points of upright dealing, which no human laws could possibly provide for. As *Aristotle* says of Righteousness, that it is comprehensive of all virtues, Ἐν δὲ Δικαιοσύνῃ συλλήσδην πᾶσι Ἀρεταῖς ἐστὶ; so indeed was it the sum of God's law.

For in the Decalogue, besides our duty towards God in the first table (which is Righteousness too,) the second includes all the obligations of justice one towards another. In respect to both which *St. Paul* (ver. 16. of this chapter,) makes profession of this universal Righteousness: *And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* And *Christ* came to advance it still higher, of whom the *Psalmist* speaks, that *the sceptre of his kingdom was a righteous sceptre; Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity*, Psal. xlv. 6. 7. And *Isaiah* to the same purpose, chap. xi. v. 5. *Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins:* and chap. ix. where his character is drawn, it is said of his kingdom, that *it shall be established with judgment and justice.* And he was usually styled by the
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Prophets, * *The Lord our Righteousness*. And himself hath declared *judgment, mercy and faithfulness*, to be the *weightier matters of the law*, Mat. xxiii. In which chapter too he pronounces all those woes against the *scribes, pharisees and lawyers* altogether for their *unrighteous dealings*; and as often denounced against his own followers, that *except their righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven*. For they were a sort of men who kept a mighty pother about religion, but could not keep themselves honest: and they have had their imitators in the Christian Church, who have been very zealous, as they would seem in holiness, but have had very little regard to the law of righteousness; which indeed makes up but a Christian-monster.

Thus I take *Righteousness* to be the sum of our whole religion, and whilst we are unrighteous one towards another, we are no followers of Christ the righteous: whatsoever zeal or preciseness we may shew in some other duties, all our services on this day will be of little account or acceptance with God, unless we take care also the whole week to please him in righteous dealing.

Every one that doth righteousness is born of God, saith St. John; and in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. *Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God*, and then we may easily guess to whom he belongs. *Nay, in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness*, saith St. Peter, *is accepted of him*: And

* Jer. xxiii, 5.

if a man be just, and doth that which is lawful and right, says the Prophet, he shall save his soul alive. 1 Joh. ii. 29. iii. 7. viii. 10. Act. x. 35. Ezek. xviii. 27.

Now it will be too tedious to reckon up all the particular cases of right and wrong; they are vastly numerous. But in any case we shall never want a direction, and an easy solution too in all doubtful matters, if we run over in our minds that fundamental principle of equity never too often to be repeated, which our Saviour lays down, Mat. vii. 12. *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even the same to them; for this is the law and the prophets;* that is, the complex of all your religion: and as much is imply'd in that command, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self.* This the most selfish-man must allow to be far beyond all objection; self shall be judge: as we deal with ourselves, let that be the measure towards others, in all commerce and conversation in the world; and then we may forbear perplexing ourselves about the numerous points of *Casuists* upon this subject. For our conscience cannot be at a loss in the practice of Righteousness; only put the case home; as thus: To be injured, to be traduced, to have one's reputation violated, to be over-reach'd tho' by wit and subtlety, every one will call injustice: oh, barbarous usage! will find it out, tho' never so nice and minute, when done by another, and himself the sufferer: but then upon easy application he cannot fail of discovering what must be injurious and hard upon another man. Again, if

he must love his neighbour as himself; nature will scarce ever extend the duty to the passion of love, nor can the precept intend it: but it is a command easy to be kept, by exercising a conscience *void of offence* towards our neighbour, in being as exactly just to him as to ourselves.

For Righteousness is even a superior command to love itself. Though that excellent virtue of charity be by our Apostle preferred before all the great and glorious gifts of the holy Spirit, yet must it vail to justice, and be suspended in the exercise of it, rather than that should be violated. *Thou shalt not countenance a poor man in his cause*, saith the law, (*Exod. xxii. 3.*) which will never allow mercy and pity to supersede justice.

As thus Righteousness is the sum of all the laws of God, both natural and positive, and the great end of all human laws: so, I must tell you, is it like to prove the whole business of the day of judgment, when by the exactest rules of justice all the unrighteousness of mankind is to be examined. *Let no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter*, says our Apostle (*1 Thess. iv. 6.*) *Because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forwarned you, and testified.* And St. Peter tells us, that God reserves the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished; when they shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, who loved the wages thereof. *2 Pet. ii. 9. 13. 15.* The old rule will then in a great measure be revived, it will then in justice be done to us, as we have done to others; and our heavenly Father will shew us
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such mercy in giving and forgiving, as we have shewed upon earth to our fellow-brethren; therefore let us look to it, this is but justice, true divine righteousness.

To the sins therefore of injury and unrighteousness there is a troublesome appendage: A necessity of restitution, where it can be made to the injur'd person, or in a very large proportion to the poor, as Casuists have determined the point, where it cannot be done to the right party. *Zacheus* thought it in vain to come in to the gospel of righteousness, or so much as pretend to conversion, till he had given in his resolution and insurance of making a fore-fold restitution, besides, farther to expiate, of giving a moiety of what remained to the use of the poor. For indeed it is impossible repentance should be valid in its own nature, as well as acceptable with God, without restitution in such cases. For what sincerity or honest meaning can there be in that penitent, who still lives upon the profit of his sin; who whines and grieves for his crime, and yet will not recall it (though in his power) or so much as wish it undone? Now restoration doth in a manner undo the fact; and there can be no true sorrow for a thing done, unless there be a desire, and an endeavour also to undo it, as much as in us lies. Nay, we cannot so much as begin repentance without actual restitution, or some way or other of either making, or assuring of amends; because our guilt in the injury done, must be first done away as far as lies in our power. So that, that duty which already is the toil of our religion, and

therefore commonly put off to the last, because thought so tedious and grievous, must have a much greater clog upon this consideration. It is a sad reckoning indeed, but it must be made in this world to prevent a worse in the next, that the man of injury and oppression, who perhaps hath wholly lived and grown rich and great by those crimes, must become a bankrupt, before he can commence a penitent; and like the bird in the Fable must be stripp'd of all his borrowed or stolen feathers, because he is cloathed with unrighteousness, and hath feathered his nest with other mens possessions.

And this penitence ought to be engaged in very soon, that so long a train of unrighteous dealing may be timely and fairly transacted back again. For otherwise, what a crowd will there be about the unrighteous man upon his death-bed to receive the returns of the numerous injuries he hath done them? And that crime is so seldom prosperous in this world, that it is a great venture but that he dies insolvent. But how great must be the incapacity both of repentance and restitution in those who have been robbers of states and kingdoms, and whose injuries and oppressions have been dilated over large dominions and territories! Let them look to it, there is a judgment to come, and they must all come to a reckoning before a God that will with unerring justice and exactness state their accounts.

We have reason then to tremble at all thoughts of injustice, because we must either shamefully restore here, or, like obstinate malefactors, die for

for it hereafter. I mean that worst or second death, by falling under the eternal vengeance of God's justice. For satisfaction must be made, or the sinner, according to the proceeding in the gospel, will be delivered over to the tormentors, till he hath paid the utmost farthing. Thus far of Righteousness, as short as I could, upon a subject of so large an extent.

II. As Justice and Righteousness must be the rule of our consciences towards others, so Temperance must govern us in respect to ourselves; but withall it is a virtue of such communicative goodness, that he who can govern his lusts and passions, (in which Temperance must chiefly consist) be sure in the publick makes the best governour, and the best subject; is fittest for all human societies, for all righteous and peaceable conversation in the world. For all tyranny and oppression is a certain sort of intemperance, and so is all faction and sedition. All quarrels and commotions in the world are occasioned by the violating the bounds of this virtue, according to the exhortation of St. James chap. iv. ver. 1. *From whence come wars and fightings amongst you? come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?*

But we will consider it precisely, (as was designed) in relation to the government of ourselves; which is therefore a virtue of such necessity for the preservation of human nature, that by the exercise of it, we keep our bodies and minds in that due frame and temper, which truly is most natural, and certainly most happy; consist-

ing in a method of living that is most conducive to the preservation of our beings, and to the most proper as well as lasting enjoyment of the world.

It was the great aim of moral philosophy, to teach men to govern themselves, and Temperance was the great doctrine and practice of their schools; a virtue absolutely necessary to make up that felicity they so much enquired after, and thought attainable in this life.

The *Epicureans* talk great things of their master's temperance, though he hath since been traduced as the great founder of luxury. It is true, he founded all happiness in the pleasures of this life. But then he was a very cleanly voluptuary, maintaining, that felicity consisted in the moderate use of those delights, and that sensuality was inconsistent both with philosophy and an happy life.

The grand duty of Christianity, which is called by the harsh and rugged name of mortification, or self-denial, is all but a strict and regular temperance, by which we abstain not only from unlawful pleasures, because sinful, but can be moderate also in those that are lawful; that we may not pamper ourselves up into forgetfulness, but be enabled on all occasions to resist temptation; so to master ourselves in what is allowable, that we may be sure not to fail in resisting what is forbidden. *Every one that striveth for the mastery, that is, over himself, his own strongest enemy, is temperate in all things, says our Apostle.* 1 Cor. ix. 25.

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It is a virtue of a large extent, and every irregularity argues a want of it. It is an attendant upon all other virtues; because virtue consisteth in resistance, and both the extremes of every virtue are a certain sort of intemperance; not only the opposite vice, but also the stretch of that virtue beyond its due bounds and limits. For instance; the Righteousness we last discoursed upon, is subject to this sort of intemperance: and so is wisdom too, if we allow of the Wiseman's advice, Eccles. vii. 16. *Be not righteous over-much, neither make thy self over-wise: why shouldst thou destroy thy self?* There is a *summum jus*, a certain rigour of justice and pretended righteousness, that borders upon injury and cruelty: and so likewise by being over-wise and prudential, we are often check'd and restrain'd in prosecuting many honest and generous designs and actions. And even Temperance itself may be subject to this excess, there being instances upon record of those that have macerated themselves with such extreme abstinence as hath soon dispatch'd them into another world. And *Epiphanius* tell us of certain Hereticks called *Encratites*, who were zealous to a fault in the veneration of those two virtues, Continence and Temperance: Heresy was a name too harsh to be pronounced upon them, but no doubt an unjustifiable severity and injury might be done against even natural concupiscence, the desires and appetites of the body. For *no man* (says our Apostle *Eph. v. 25.*) *ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it*, implying, that there may be a violence upon nature
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that may be unlawful as well as unnatural. Nay, religion in general may be liable to the same imputation: And as Atheism and infidelity are its vitious opposites on the one hand, so idolatry and superstition are the excess and debauchery of it on the other. And there is, besides, an exorbitant zeal that too often attends it, which proves the worst intemperance of all, and in innumerable instances hath done the greatest mischiefs in the world, and thereby exposed the honour and authority of religion to scorn and derision, only gratified Atheists and Unbelievers, and increased their numbers.

I have not time to discourse of those vices that stand more in our eye, and are more notoriously opposite to the virtue of Temperance according to common observation: I mean *gluttony* and *drunkenness*. I do not know whether *Felix* was particularly chargeable with them; tho' his accusations against the rules of temperance were heinous enough.

Indeed they are vices too filthy to be drawn in their proper colours in this place: as to the latter, we have scarce any practice amongst the *Ancients* (tho' they were good fellows too) that run parallel with the modern improvements in drinking. We are apt to look out for a similitude among the beasts, and so often call it *bestial* and *swinish*, but we wrong the brute in the comparison: it is altogether become what we may call human; that is, the practice only of the rational animal, man. It is only bestial, because it obliterates reason, but then it is destructive to nature,

nature, and we have no examples but among our selves that prosecute designs against their own lives. Nature in all God's creatures, notwithstanding the power of appetites, endeavours its own preservation. But man by this intemperance, notwithstanding his pretence to reason, his sense and fears of death, bids fairly in every act for its assault, and runs the venture of his last fate. But since he will be worse than brutish, and we cannot stop him in his career, it will be a folly to argue with him; we will therefore dismiss him in the language of the royal Preacher, and let him take what follows, Ecclef. xi. 9. *Rejoyce, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.* Most certainly a safer and more manly course of life would be, to walk according to our Apostle's doctrine, *Titus ii. 12, 13.* which teacheth us, that *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of that great God, and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* And that is the doleful time of this Judgment to come; and the concluding subject of St. Paul's rational Discourse.

III. Of the certainty of a Judgment to come.

This point we must endeavour to make good, as far as we are able, by Reason, according to St. Paul's method, tho' properly the subject of Revelation: but that could have no authority upon

on *Felix* an unbeliever. I shall accordingly confine myself to some few arguments of natural Reason to confirm this great and tremendous article of our Faith, so abundantly attested to us out of the Holy Scriptures, whose evidences and testimonies we will for the present wave. And let this be urged as our

(1.) *First* argument from Reason; *viz.* That such a Judgment to come had been the opinion and general persuasion of mankind throughout all ages: and tho' we put no stress upon their fables of *Elyzium* and *Tartarus*, and their three infernal Judges; yet even the absurdity of those fictions was not so great as a total denial of a truth which nature and reason had made in them so deep impressions of.

Now, as it is reasonably thought a powerful argument for the proof of a Deity, that all nations have had some notion of such a supreme being, though they have been dark and gross in their apprehensions of him, and consequently in their worship: so ought it to pass for as reasonable an argument for the proof of this point, that mankind hath as generally agreed in the apprehensions of a future Judgment, and of the rewards and punishments of another life; tho' for want of clearer light and revelation, their accounts of that estate have been made up of ridiculous fictions.

There are but two sects upon record, that have opposed this general opinion.

1. The *Epicureans*, who denied a providence, complemented their deity out of the government of

of the world, because it was below his grandeur to interests himself in such little matters, or would disturb the serenity and quiet of his enjoyments and retirement; and then be sure there could be no occasion for a Judgment to come.

2. The other were the *Sadduces* among the *Jews*, who confining their Faith to the five books of *Moses*, and all the promises to the things of this life only, had no thought of a future estate (as they had not of Angels and Spirits) and so consequently excluded all imagination of any Judgment to come, out of their creed.

But there are very inconsiderable exceptions to the general persuasion of the certainty of future rewards and punishments.

(2.) But, waving all reasoning from this almost universal tradition, If we acknowledge the being of a God surrounded with all those attributes or properties which must essentially belong unto him; as that he was the creator and continues the governor of the whole world; that he is almighty, all-knowing, infinitely just and merciful; to whom sin, and all that is contrary to rectitude and justice and goodness, are directly opposite; and all the agents thereof are his rebellious enemies: If we grant too, that all the actions of men are done upon choice, (otherwise indeed they would have no sin in them) and that, by the conduct of Reason they are able to distinguish betwixt good and evil, (for the actions of brutes cannot be accountable or sinful) and yet perversely, in enmity to God, and for the love of sin, do they chuse the evil

evil and refuse the good. Upon these concessions we must necessarily conclude, that God must bring man to judgment for this prevarication, which often escapes the cognizance and penalties of human laws, and seldom meets with its adequate punishment upon earth: Otherwise sin and Satan and all wicked agents must have the ascendancy over heaven; and God declared either insensible of his honour, or not able to vindicate it against his professed enemies.

(3.) A third Reason must be as conclusive from the contemplation of his providence here below, where the wicked are equal if not the better sharers of his temporal blessings. Surely it is because the things of this life are but inconsiderable matters, not the absolute determining tokens of God's good pleasure or just anger; but there is a Judgment to come which shall set all things to rights, when all we call irregularities or partialities shall be made up according to the exactest and most visible rules of justice and due proportion.

The tyrant, the oppressor, the lascivious wanton, and the filthy voluptuary, all the villains in unrighteousness, and all the devotees of lust, that have lived in defiance of justice and intemperance, that have gone off with peace and triumph from this world, shall be brought to the bar of infinite Justice, where no circumstances shall escape an exact scrutiny and trial; nor themselves the eternal vengeance of that Almighty power they have despised. And then the innocent, the merciful, the righteous, the temperate;
they

they that have not been allowed, or have virtuously denied themselves the pleasure and profits of this present life; that have been often pressed and kept under here below, shall be received into almighty favour; shall be exalted in the face of the whole world; shall, for their righteous dealings, be rewarded with the crown of righteousness; shall, for their former sorrows and self-denials, receive fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

Therefore, if God doth not seem to men to keep an even hand in his providence here below; he will most certainly do it in the next world, as he is most certainly just and merciful. What soever by permission hath passed irregularly here, shall there be adjusted to such equality, that every mouth shall be stopped; and all the world of wicked men shall be guilty before God.

(4.) A *Fourth* reason we may be furnished with at home; from conscience, the inseparable companion of our souls; that spy upon all our actions; which teazes and torments us with second thoughts, and hinders our digestion in every sin. Now what should be the reason of so much disturbance, of so many throws and pangs of conscience after the commission; when we are sure to escape present justice, and that which in some sins is most dreaded, the shame and discovery of the world; when all goes well and roundly with the sinner, and he is come off with success and triumph, and his sin hath been prosperous as well as pleasant?

Surely reason and conscience are not so far asunder,

funder, but they may agree in the same verdict; and the same man may pronounce 'Certainly from the apprehensions of my conscience, and of my reason too, my mind gives me there must be a future estate, and a judgment to come; when the divine vengeance, that now is so naturally and irresistably feared, but for the present escaped, shall be the certain portion of all unrighteous and intemperate livers.'

(s.) *Lastly*, To conclude, Should these reasonings amount but to a bare probability, or somewhat less than a probability; that is, that we have more persuasive arguments to disbelieve, or much question this judgment to come; would it not be the greatest stupidity, in a matter of everlasting concern, not to provide for such a possible appearance? No man of common management but will consult council, get ready his witnesses, and prepare all other advantages for his cause, though there may be great probability that it may not come to a tryal, or his adversary will let it fall. For if Righteousness and Temperance be never rewarded in the world to come, yet be sure no man will be punished for those virtues; and to spend so much time as that of a short life, in the practice of them, can be no great loss; (there are some present satisfactions in their very exercise, as a reward in hand) but sin can never escape the vengeance of heaven, or, be sure, never come in for any reward of glory and happiness; and, if eternal torments may but possibly be its portion, it is argument sufficient, (were we not perversely bent upon ruin) to terrify us from a continuance in its practice. Be-

Besides, should all fail of truth, certainly no man will be troubled on his death-bed, that he had not been more unrighteous and injurious; or more frequently lewd and intemperate; that he did not spend more of his time in prosecuting those and other vices, with greater vigour and impiety. So that it is incitement enough to be virtuous, even upon that shorter prospect of satisfaction, *viz.* of finishing our last groans with peace and courage; and at our last hour, not to be tormented with the terrible apprehensions of a Judgment that may come.

In short, we have all the reasons in the world to believe a Judgment to come; but if it be but a probability, we have unanswerable reasons to live as if it were a certainty. And then, I pray take notice, that we shall meet with a judge who cannot be deceived, or imposed upon. No vain apologies can sooth or remit his justice. No bribes can extort his mercy. No quality, or pretence of honour can prevail with him, who is no respecter of persons. No wickedness shall escape, though laid up in the most hidden corners of our hearts, or sealed down with oaths and execrations of secrecy and concealment. God shall bring to light the hidden works of darkness, and make manifest the councils of the hearts. Every circumstance and aggravation of sin shall appear in its true light, and must fall under its due merit. Crimes shall then be rightly distinguished; and covetousness, and faction, and revenge, and all turbulent zeal, with the extensive mischiefs that have been wrought by them, shall perhaps,
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have a precedency in guilt and damnation, to all the debaucheries in the world. That which we would not have discovered for the gain of the whole world, shall then (when we shall be more sensible of our guilt, and tender of our honour) be made manifest to our eternal shame, and confusion. The matter will soon be ended by an all-mighty and all-knowing God; the sentence is drawn up already: *Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: but depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: and these shall go into everlasting punishment,* says our Lord, *but the righteous into life eternal.* Let this sentence be ever sounding in our ears, and let the due dread of it abide in our hearts; let *Felix's* transitory passion, with us be lasting, and never intermitted, till we have worked out our salvation with fear and trembling.

God of his infinite mercy, grant, by the assistance of his grace and holy spirit, that we may live all our days in Righteousness and Temperance, and in a full belief (but without horror or despair) of a Judgment to come; that so we may obtain eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God, and three Persons, be ascribed all honour, majesty, and dominion, now and for evermore.
Amen.

SERMON VI.

PART I. Preach'd on St. John
Baptist's Day.

PROV. XVI. 2.

*All the ways of a Man are clean in his
own Eyes; — but the Lord weigheth
the Spirits.*

THE ways and actions of men (upon the dreadful account that they are to be brought to judgment before an all-discerning God) are of very weighty consideration. And yet men strangely overlook them; not so much the acts themselves, as the intentions, the sinister designs and ends in the performance, which make so considerable a difference, that moral and immoral actions are not more contrary the one to the other, than the same is differenced from itself by the purposes and inclinations of him that acts.

And though the best Casuists have decided the point, that a good intention cannot sanctify an

evil or immoral act; yet be sure an indirect or evil intention will fully and foul the best performances. Nay, sometimes even modes and circumstances do so diversify the act, that thereby it becomes less good, or more evil, than we commonly imagine.

Man is wonderfully apt to come to a satisfaction, and to be very easy with himself in such cases: and tho' usually censorious enough in relation to others, yet cares not to look home, or to make any close inspection into his own ways; tho' what is specious and fair in his own eyes, really in its self, and before God, is rotten and corrupt, and proceeds from a vitious source and origine. The Wiseman pronounces it, and observation will make it good: *All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, &c.* And it is repeated again Chap. xxi. 2. *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the hearts:* and more home ver. 25. of the chapter before you, *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

Proof of this will be made good, if according to the division, plain in the Text, we examine,

I. *First*, The false judgment of man. *All his ways are clean in his own eyes.*

II. *Secondly*, The review, or right judgment of God: *but the Lord weigheth the Spirits.*

I. *First*, We have before us the false judgment of man. *All his ways are clean in his own eyes.*

eyes. All his ways, you see, are censured by intimation: the best of them are not truly right and genuine, if we should refer them to the judgment of God.

One would think he were secure, if his heart stand but right: but alas! even there he can have no confidence, for by degrees it will be corrupted and brought into the deception. *The heart* (says the Prophet *Jeremy*, ch. xvii. ver. 9.) *is deceitful above all things; who can know it?* Only God; so it is declar'd ver. 10. *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his way, and according to the fruit of his doings.* It often deceiveth the owner himself in the estimate of his ways: as, from thence sometimes ariseth a certain zeal against sin, and a zeal for the laws and honour of God; for which, upon search, there will be found indirect causes and occasions; but he presently concludes he hath the concurrence of his heart, which commonly is no more than the transport of some passions, and so all is clean and satisfactory, if he may be judge. Yet says our Wiseman, *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool, but who so walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.* Prov. xxviii. 26.

To walk wisely, which in the Wiseman's sense is always meant to walk virtuously and religiously, we must have a truer measure than the partial complacence of our own hearts: and let that be this; always to consider, that *God weigheth the spirits*, that he views the spring and source of all our actions, the temper, disposition, the secret design and end in acting; looks into

all the most hidden recesses of our souls, and nothing escapes him. Therefore farther are we to think before, or reflect afterwards, upon every action; whether it can be accepted or approved by him, when we are conscious to ourselves of the many flaws and failures in the performance; nay, sometimes of such indirect and foul designs, as can make it little less than nauseous and detestable in the sight of God, and of man too, who looks behind the curtain and sees the masks and vizards taken off.

The preparative embassy of *John the Baptist*, before the coming of our Lord, was wholly for this purpose: his baptism was the sign and initiation, and his doctrine and example of repentance was the actual engagement in this cleansing work. For *to prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths strait*, was to clear off that, rubbish and corruption which had so long over-spread the whole *Jewish* religion, both doctrines and precepts, by the management of that *generation of vipers*, as he calls them, the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* and other teachers; who by their dissolute glosses on the whole law of *Moses*, and by their own filthy hypocrisies and corrupt practices, had quite obstructed the way and passage from that œconomy to the kingdom of the *Messias* which was then at hand. And till all our ways are cleaner, than commonly they are in our own eyes, we are no fit subjects for the kingdom of Christ, whose baptism our Baptist hath acknowledged with due humility was far more sublime than his, *viz. with the Holy Ghost and with fire*, the most refined purity;

rity; and whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn the chaff, &c.

Let us then fall upon the examination of our ways, and that upon these two topicks or heads of discourse:

- (1.) In respect to our sins. And
 - (2.) In respect to what we call our religion.
- (1.) Our ways are more unclean than they seem to be in our own eyes in relation to our sins.

Sin hath been so great a familiar in our conversations, that it is no wonder if in some degree it hath got our esteem and approbation, at least our favourable connivence; we suffer it to crowd in amongst our virtues, and are not so harsh and capricious, as that great man in the gospel, to cast it out, because it hath not on its proper garb; but we entertain it in the most civil manner, that is, with excuses and alleviations. And as to conscience, our bosom-friend, we can make more bold with it; tho' it had an original tenderness, and might be querulous, yet by habit and custom we appease it, and lay it quiet. Nay, from a severe judge and censor, we can make it a party, and to go hand in hand with us in the commission, at least approbation, of some gentle and harmless transgressions (as we are brought to esteem them). It was an old shift, and still serves upon occasion, *It is but a little one, and my soul shall live,* Gen. xix. 20.

The circumstances of time and education, with other accidental occurrences, do vary our notions and apprehensions of sin; As

1. We may observe, what we trembled at, when tender and in our youth, by custom and usage we are made more hardy in; our courage bears up, and we boldly fall on the commission with very little reluctance before, or reflection after. As some children strictly disciplined not to take God's name in vain, many times grow up into so bold an use of it, as to blaspheme it in dreadful oaths and execrations, and that with so little restraint, as scarce to know when they vent them, The sin had a sting at first, but we soon pull it out, or, by often handling and gentling of it, make it harmless and inoffensive. One commission was somewhat grievous, and was like to raise a small effort of repentance, had not the repetition of it prevented us by reconciling the sin, and throwing off the sting as impertinent and useless. And in all these proceedings, men will pretend they are grown wiser, and have clear'd themselves of superstitious fears; that such and such sins are of the Priest's making, but now they know better things; when be sure they are in a much worse condition, given up to hardness of heart and a reprobate sense.

2. Some sins at a distance of time, and committed long ago (tho' very heinous) are usually forgot by us, or have lessened in our sentiments of their guilt: As tho' we had given ourselves full absolution, or the sin were superannuated, quite decayed, and had lost its strength and malignity; whereas those of latter date, more fresh in our memories, excite us to greater appearance of horror. But alas! Time cannot in the least obliterate

obliterate their guilt, nor can it be taken off without repentance (with reformation) continued to the end of our days. And a sin of seven years standing, or never so old, unrepented of, is in full force, as to all aggravation, as one of yesterday: And God, we know, sometimes punishes at a great distance from the sin. Altho' he will be *merciful to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments*, yet he will punish too to the *third and fourth generation of them that hate him*: A sure sign, the memory of the sin is kept up with him. Here then we are far from cleanness in respect to our old sins, tho' they have given us the slip as to our remembrance of them; or our remorse for them is much remitted. For they are all recorded and written in a book; and the hand-writing of God will not be blotted out, altho' we have lost the counter-part.

3. Difference in quality, and the several ways of men's living, varies their sentiments of some sins. Some liberty must be taken (as men will argue on the sinning side) for company-sake, and compliance, and because it is the way of the world; and so think they may a little transgress the rules of morality, to observe those of good manners: By which many sins become venial to the spark, to the man of quality; nay, to the man of business and great engagements in the world, which an honest-hearted plain-dealing man would startle at the commission of: so they are never like to cleanse their ways, or bring those sins under the discipline of repentance; because they think them necessary, or at least allowable to their particular stations. But as God
is

is no respecter of persons, so surely in personal miscarriages he will not distinguish, unless it be with aggravation on their side, who are of the superior quality; for he hath settled no man in any such station or way of living in the world, as will give him liberty or toleration to continue in any sinful course.

4. As we are thus civilly and complementally sinful one with another, requisite and necessary (as we will have it) for our commerce and conversation in the world; so likewise we often bear a civility and preference to some sins, above others, and think ourselves all the while very clean. Thus avarice, pride, and revenge, meet with an hospitable reception from some people, whilst sensuality and common debauchery, being shameful and unprofitable, are decently rejected and cast out. Those former are cleanly sins as we fancy them, and we are in some measure educated in the approbation of them; we think that we cannot be without them, if we consult our credit and interest in the world. But, I pray, let us rightly consider and weigh them. Can we put them at a lower rate in the esteem of God? Is not their malignity more diffusive? Are there more laws, or reason there should be, in the word of God, against the voluptuary who acts but like a brute, than against the covetous, ambitious, and revengeful man who acts like a devil? whom neither common justice, nor the law of God, nor the bonds of friendship can ever tie up from promoting his ends? who thinks no means unlawful that are expedient to carry on his designs, and

and if he refrain from other enormities, it is in all likelihood upon that very consideration, that they are not fit for his purpose? When we call avarice by its right name of fordidness, we express the greatest filthiness and corruption. And pride and malice will put men upon such foul actions as shall outvie the baseness and vileness of the most dissolute livers. Nay, sometimes too (so strong is our deception and conceit) these very sins we would be thought to hate and be clean from, because we hate and condemn them in others. The Pharisee valued himself, because he was not a Publican, though he was knave enough in every thing else, only not engaged in that profession. He practised the same sins in specie, only sanctified them with devotion. For *he made long prayers, and devoured widows houses*, and in that prevarication out-did the worst of Publicans and sinners. How apt are we to cry out of covetousness, pride, and spitefulness in our neighbours? But as they have the foulest aspect in others, the conclusion must unavoidably turn upon us, that they cannot be clean in our own practice.

5. Our tempers and constitutions sometimes are of that happy frame as to have a natural aversion to some sins; but that cleanliness is not thanks-worthy, if we can more glibly swallow down those that are more palatable. Virtue consisteth in resistance and holiness, in denying ourselves, and we are unclean throughout, while we indulge any one lust of the flesh. By implication we break all the commandments in the breach of one, as St. *James* tells us, (*Jam. ii. 10.*)
and

and surely it can be no excuse that it is pleasant to us to break that one, but a certain demonstration that we would break them all, could we find the same pleasure and satisfaction.

Partiality towards our sins is a most notorious deceitfulness, and to retain some as favourites (though we reject others) is a certain corruption in the government of ourselves; and it is to be feared that such men have scarce a virtue but they have a vice to pair it with: but what must be their unhappiness, the virtue is not of so cleansing a nature, as to clear them of the vice or expiate the guilt: nor shall God have so much share in them by their righteousness, as Satan by their wickedness. It is his peculiar cunning to make this mixture, and the poison is the more sure to take; therefore have a care of this deception. He cares not, let the man be devout at his prayers, or his sabbaths, so he will but be uncharitable or malicious. Let him be charitable, so he will but be unchaste or intemperate; Let him be sober and abstemious, so he will but oppress or be cruel. Let him please himself with his strict justice, so he will but be covetous or ambitious. The devil gains more by the vice than he loses by the virtue. Nay, let him carry on a whole course of good works, so he can but run him up into vanity and conceitedness; or hold him fast by making him retain some great transgression; he is sure enough of his motley disciple. For by this means the saint, or sinner, (for he is both by turns) goes on in such full satisfaction, as to his
brighter

brighter part, that he overlooks all his blots and miscarriages, and, what adds more to his conceitedness, thinks God will do so too. In fine, innumerable are our mistakes in relation to our sins, by which it will be impossible for us to come to that sense and knowledge of them, as must dispose us to the indispensable duty of repentance, till we are better skill'd, and more nice and exact in this cleansing work.

As farther; A sin that lies brooding in the thoughts, and cannot come out into act for want of opportunity, or dare not venture out for fear of shame, or present punishment, is notwithstanding a great Uncleaness, and very odious in the sight of God, how fair soever are our outward actings; and the filthiness is the greater, and will stench the more, the more that it is hidden and lies in corners.

Again; An habit or course of lesser evils continued through our whole lives, together with a regardlessness and laziness in religious exercises, amounts to a greater guilt, than one single lapse or fall though into some great transgression. The one (which is the habit) looks like hardness of heart, as though our natures were wholly deprived, and the other but like a chance-fall, that shews our natures are not impeccable or sinless. And yet we are apt to employ the whole powers of our Repentance on the last, and slovenly pass over the habitual Uncleaness; whereas an habitual virtue and holiness through the main or general part of our conversations, would in some measure rather expiate for the great offence, or be sure lessen the aggravation.

David

David was a man after God's own heart, yet some of his sins were almost matchless, scarce to be parallell'd amongst mankind; but the more continued course of his goodness, both in heart and good life, together with his penitence for those enormities, kept him in the favour and high esteem of his God.

What an horrible crime was that of *St. Peter*, to deny his master and Saviour? But the good disciple must not be cast away for one fault; his well known piety and integrity before, and his repentance after, may well stave off the condemnation, even for so great a sin. Whereas the villainy of *Judas* arose from a vitiated temper, which had shewed itself in many repeated acts of fordidness and treachery, and he repented too, and hanged himself.

Many other observable notices might be made of our sins, which would discover more Uncleaness in our own ways than we are aware of; and a weight of guilt beyond what we usually feel. A strict examination therefore is very requisite, and ought to be frequent. Although our hearts (where our passions rule most) may deceive us, as you have heard already; yet we have an understanding, a superior faculty of reason, that will stand by us, that can judge of every action, whether it be right or wrong, whether the good be clean and entire, and will find acceptance with an all-discerning God, and also what circumstances of aggravation may attend the evil, which may make it more exceedingly provoking in his sight. And if we would but judge our-
selves,

selves, says St. Paul, (1 Cor. xi. 31.) *we should not be judged of the Lord.* Self-condemnation will the more indemnify us before the throne of God. But

(2.) A more refined degree of purity, and Cleanness we assume to ourselves, from that little practice of religion we carry on, and much depend upon. And this we shall examine in some few instances, but from whence we may conclude a deficiency in the whole.

1. It is well known, that bare believing and professing goes a great way with us; a conceit that we are in the right way; when we may perish in that as well as in the wrong, if it be the right only of believing. For the true visible Church of Christ is made up of hypocrites, as well as sound believers and practitioners. The Pharisee was the soundest in his faith, yet the Sadducee counted the honestest man, and the very Publican ever preferred before him. If we can suppose that immorality can consist with a sound faith, it is certainly the worst of its kind, and the most inexcusable.

Our believing, whatever reasons we may pretend for it, is but a senseless act of the understanding towards saving us; if we believe only in Christ, and profess his Name, and advance his merits, and trust to him to do our business, when we do none of our own. He is the rock of our salvation, the foundation, and chief corner-stone; but we must build upon it, and come in with our conformity to all that we believe and have received from him. Believing is but a pitiful

pitiful complement to heaven, when we go no farther; it is only giving God the hearing (as we use to speak) which is the greatest flight and flur we can put upon him. Besides, in truth, we are not so clean and clear in that as we imagine. We think, that is, we conceit we believe, when in practice or matter of fact (the truest evidence) we prove it impossible: for who believes all that he hears or reads of God, of heaven and hell, the way of being saved, that is, everlastingly happy, and how to escape eternal ruin, and yet can live careless and supine, as though all were a fable? We may think we believe, but the *Lord weigheth the spirits*, and finds us unbelievers: and indeed if God had proposed heaven upon bare believing, it had been propounding the highest glory as a reward for a mere conceit, an imagination or fancy, the lightest qualification; credulity being commonly the weakness of man's judgment; but when a suitable practice is inseparably annexed, then it becomes a rational faith, and a rational service.

And believing is required first, because it doth in a natural course, bring on a conformity to what is believed; for towards all that is desirable and attainable in this world, we move by the impulse of nature upon the belief that we may compass it; we must prove then (and we have no other way) our faith by our works; St. Paul therefore chatechises (2 Cor. xv. 5.) the *Corinthians*, already converted, as was supposed, in this first principle. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves, know*

ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate? This is a desperate mistake in our ways, and upon our first letting forth, if we are not as yet true believers; and we are most certainly not so, unless we live up to that Christian persuasion.

2. Let a second enquiry be about our devotion; particularly, what we most confide in, our addresses to God in prayer; oh! That is mighty satisfactory, when we have sent up a few cold and heedless petitions to heaven: but what true service or delight can it be to the God of heaven, if we consider the ways and measures of our performance? Take heed then of too much confidence or conceited cleanness in this duty, unless it be better amended.

The rule of our Saviour is this, (*Luke xviii. 1.*) *And he spake a parable unto them to this end; that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* And likewise of the Apostle St. Paul, (*1 Thess. v. 17.*) *that they should pray without ceasing.* Without taking advantage from the literal interpretation; is there so much as a continual disposition in us to pray? A constant elevation of our hearts to God, to answer in some degree these strict injunctions? Nay, so clear are we of the heresy of the *Euchitæ*, (who thought themselves obliged at all times from these Texts to be actually exercised in prayer) that even that scanty portion of time, whether private or publick, that we set aside for this devotion is not justly paid: for how much of it is taken up with wandering thoughts, which steal upon us more at that, than

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any other time? And we do no more pray whilst we are thinking on other matters, than we read whilst our eyes are off the Book. Nay, is it not true? That very often the whole time hath been spent in the formal performance, and we have quite forgot to be devout; have nimbly dispatch'd our prayers, but have not had God in all our thoughts.

The other part of the caution our Lord gives us, is, that we must have a care of fainting in this holy exercise; that men ought always to pray, and *not to faint*: no doubt our Saviour, who had the deepest sense of our infirmities, foreknew that we should be subject to these fainting fits in our devotion: and we find it by experience; for how uneasy and painful is it to us sometimes, ready to sink under the labour and toil of lifting up our heavy hearts to God, to send up some few petitions devoutly to heaven for our own advantage, tho' we must starve, if we have not blessings from thence? We are chearful enough under all other labours that will bring us in any profit, and not apt to faint; what can it betoken, that we are so apt to be wearied and tired in these holy exercises, so loath to come to them, and so quick in our dispatch?

There are up and down in the holy Scriptures * many other directions and rules how men ought to pray: *I will*, says the forementioned Apostle, that *men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*: And says St. James,
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* 1 Tim. ii, 8. Jam. i, 6, 7. Prov. xv, 29. Psal, lxvi, 18. Mar. xi, 25, 26.

He that asketh not in Faith, or wavereth, let him not think he shall receive any thing of the Lord: And our Wiseman tells us; the Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the Righteous: And his Father before him; If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer. And our Saviour hath cast such a bar in our way against the prevalence of our prayers as is hard to be removed; viz. that it is impossible to receive forgiveness from God, (the greatest of blessings) unless we are entire in our charity, and forgive every one their trespasses: examine then your devotions by these requisites.

Our prayers can be no less than down-right affronting the majesty of heaven, a stinking favour, instead of a sweet incense, unless thus qualified. Can we think God will hear the prayers of faithless polluted and unrighteous wretches? Or forgive the greatest crimes, the highest treasons, when we cannot pass over the most petty injuries of our fellow brethren? What an impudent supplicant, or rather vile begger, was that Pharisee in the Gospel, who besides challenging the peculiarity of God's favour upon the instances of his own formal and foolish righteousness, could not forbear down-right railing against the Publican, whose submissive behaviour and posture, and short prayer too, would certainly recommend him to the throne of grace, where all noisy devotion swell'd up with hypocrisy and ill-nature must be the rudest assault.

In a word, we had better never enter into this place, or our closets, for the exercise of this

duty, unless our hearts are prepar'd and qualified by the rules and measures of that sovereign majesty, to whom our addressees are made, and who alone heareth prayer. And we truly act the greatest vanity and mockery, besides the provocation, when we carry on a course of devotion, and go not a step forward in the reformation of our lives. We had best be careful in this matter, lest our very prayers rise up in judgment against us.

3. Another duty of eminent note, and more especially for its cleansing nature, we should call to account; and that is, our charity, particularly that signal testimonial of it, in giving of Alms. Says our Saviour to the Pharisees, *Luke xi. 41. Give alms of such things as you have, and behold all things are clean unto you.* And this in some sense hath been allowed to be an expiatory duty. *Alms*, saith the Son of Syrach *, *maketh atonement for sins*: and many of the Christian Fathers in their high characters of charity would say no less than, that sins were pardoned † and abolished by alms, *i. e.* as far as man can contribute to the blotting out of his own sins; and that repentance || was incomplete and insufficient without them. But as in philosophy ‡ we say the corruption of the best things is the worst, and oft-times the most loathsome; so when our charity is not done fairly, or is the least polluted with any base designs, whatever good may luckily

* Eccus. iii. 30.

vian. l. 2. c. 13. Lactant.

Pœnitent. —

† St. Clement in his Constitutions Sal-

|| St. Chrysost. Orat. 2. de

‡ Corruptio optimi est pessima.

ly come to the receivers, it becomes the most unsavory offering we can make to God. I shall trouble you but with *two* instances of this corruption, which may put us upon farther enquiry.

As

First, When we make a filthy noise about our good works, as loud and offensive as the Pharisee's trumpet; altho' the charity of the right hand is to be kept a secret from the left. The vanities of men are commonly very expensive, and whosoever takes to this sort of vain liberality, only to receive praise of men, deserves no higher honour for his prodigal bounty, than to be reckoned among the vain and foolish men of the world: and as to his merit, it must first be determined, which is the greater sin, pride or avarice, before we can pronounce, which is the better man, or the less worthy; he that gratifies his ambition by vain glorious giving, or he that pleases his tenacious humour by provident withholding. There is,

Secondly, Another instance quite different from this, and what may be called unclean, because very unseemly and unbecoming in every one that bears the character of a charitable person: which is, when we do our alms with unnecessary moroseness and insulting passions; as sometimes we are too apt to throw out our bounty with as much indignation and all the same appearance of ill-will and ill-nature, as they who always retain and deny their beneficence; and so give nothing but hard words in reality and sincerity, and our

alms in hypocrisy, or when we know not how to avoid it.

This is contrary to the moralists rules of bestowing benefits; when the gift comes with difficulty, with hard words and grudging looks, it is more than half abated in its value and acceptance; nay, must needs be uncomfortable alms to the poor supplicant, next to that ill-natur'd case suggested in the Gospel, when the hard-hearted donor giveth, tho' not instead of, yet together with the bread, a stone; with the fish a serpent, and with the egg a scorpion (*Luke xi. 11, 12*). Saith the wise son of *Syrach*, * *In all thy gifts shew a cheerful countenance*: and says *St. Paul*|| of greater authority; *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver*; and so be sure doth the receiver too, and oft-times more than the gift itself. The same Apostle makes a shrew'd † supposition; which sounds like a paradox, but must be a possible instance; that a man may bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and yet have no charity; a most extravagant liberality to part with any of the good things of this world without one grain of good nature; *without any principle of charity and compassion, to contribute to the good of others, but either to please men or acquire glory*, or out of some foolish and sinister design. It must be wretched charity, pitiful in the worst sense, to bestow all one's goods to feed the poor, and

* *Ecclus. xxxv. 9.* || *2. Cor. ix. 7.*
3. Vid. Dr. *Hammond's Paraphrase* in loc.

† *1 Cor. xiii.*

and keep back the pious disposition and charitable intent, which alone can sanctify the gift and make it a good work in the donor.

Let us then most carefully look to our charity, because it is an inseparable attendant upon all other duties of our religion, that it be clean and genuine, and bear up in resemblance to the goodness and mercy of God, from whom we receive all good things upon that very designation, that after our own necessary and suitable supply, we should freely dispense them out to those who are in want, left naked and needy, that they may be the inviting objects of our own compassion.

If we should make a narrow inspection into our other Christian performances, we should find them as highly tainted, and have been only clean (which is our unhappy delusion) in our own eyes.

4. I will give but one more instance for all; namely, in a duty which we think will serve for all, and will make all clean at last; and that is the indispensable duty of repentance; both the doctrine and discipline of which St. *John Baptist* was the most signal preacher and greatest example. But now, if we fail in this, then all is irrecoverably lost; and truly in the usual transacting of it, consisting of so many parts, it is visibly subject to many mistakes and miscarriages, by which we may justly suspect its weight and value. As

(1.) We usually deceive ourselves, and think all clean, and so are easily satisfied in the work, when we have only cast ourselves into the figure of a penitent, and appear'd so in our face, our speech, our gesture; what will deceive others, we

heedlessly suffer to deceive ourselves: if the outside be clean, others that stand by, cannot look within, and we will not look inward ourselves: it is specious to them, and we love deception, and so it is satisfactory to us.

Christ speaks of those who disfigured their faces, (*Mat.* vi. 16.) who put on a visard to act the penitent in: and *Isaiab* (chap. lviii. ver. 5.) describes it, as bowing down the head, like a bulrush; some dejection of countenance, when the heart remains hard and inflexible; or is possessed with an additional pride and vain-glory from this new face of mortification.

All these appearances of humiliation may deceive men (whom we have offended) and procure their forgiveness; but to think to impose them upon God, is enough to shut us out for ever from coming in by any repentance.

(2.) We are apt to lay great stress upon our frequent confessions; but this a man will not bear, if we are always telling him of our debts and injuries, and yet take no care to pay, nor leave off running on score.

We justly ridicule confessions to a Priest (as practised in a certain Church) and his easy absolutions: but is it not more ridiculous (if not a blasphemous mockery) to make God our confessor, and deposite our sins in a formal manner at the footstool of his mercy, and take them up again? And as to absolution, we make bold indeed from these confessions to give it ourselves, but is it not as absurd and unwarrantable as that from the forementioned priest, if we relapse into the same transgressions?

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It is no very good manners, to display and lay open our Uncleanneſs and filthineſs before a God of purer eyes than thus to behold iniquity; nor can it be pleaſing in his ſight, till we have ſet our hands to the cleanſing work. Beſides, we muſt know, that every act of Repentance and confeſſion, (how many ſoever we have gone through) is retracted by our return to the ſame ſins, and then it becomes a down-right lye and falſehood, and conſequently, itſelf a very affronting and provoking ſin.

The Jews came crowding in upon our exemplary preacher of Repentance in great multitudes from all parts, confeſſing their ſins. But he would allow none of their pleas or pretences till further proof; he preſently ſets them their task: *Bring forth fruits meet for Repentance*, as you read, *Matt. iii.* the 5th and following Verſes.

(3.) As I have told you already, we are partial towards our ſins, ſo we are apt to ſhew ourſelves in our Repentance; by laying a greater weight of humiliation upon ſome ſins that have gauled us and been more vexatious, than upon others (though as heinous, or more) that have eſcaped better, or have ſat more eaſy upon us. But ſurely this muſt make the Repentance for thoſe other ſins but of little worth, and we may juſtly ſurmize with horror, that if thoſe ſins which we have ſo little regarded, have come off with ſucceſs, or have not been marked out by an adequate puniſhment, that there is a great likelihood of a reſerve behind, and that they will be brought to judgment in the next world.

(4.) A

(4.) A passionate grief, and a mournful regret for sin, commonly goes with us a great way in the duty of Repentance; nay, we are apt to think completes the whole work. St. Paul saith indeed, *that godly sorrow worketh Repentance.* (2 Cor. vii. 10.) that is, setteth us about that work, and makes a good beginning: it is a good indication of a contrite heart, and that passion is very likely to make us look about us for the time to come; nay, it is inseparable from true Repentance, because it is that state of humiliation and mortification which are essentials of that duty. But it is by no means the whole duty, neither doth God aim at our trouble and sorrow in prescribing us Repentance, but at our reformation, after what manner soever it may be attained. He delighteth not to grieve the children of men. Our innocence will sooner assuage him than our tears; and could we laugh ourselves out of our sins, (as we use to say in some cases, though this is no laughing matter) and thereupon for ever reform our lives, there is no doubt but he would allow the expedient, and abate for our mournful bemoanings. Besides, we must have a care our sorrow be not sensual and selfish, and we bewail the ill consequences, and not the sin; that it hath prov'd a plague, and a vexation to us, and not that it is filthy in itself, enmity to God, and forbidden by his laws.

(5.) Another usual, and very good qualification of Repentance, is hatred and detestation of sin: But that too we must not so confide in, as though it would complete the whole work; because it is seldom raised but when the sin hath dis-

displeased, and some way disgusted us. For nature can never be said properly and truly to hate that, which, without some distaste, it hath ever a tendency to love. Therefore, surely the most generous and acceptable disposition and resolution would be, to forsake and abandon the sin when most pleasing to us, and our lusts are in the ascendancy of desire. For our hatred, or aversion, will not be raised naturally, till the sin hath some way or other disobliged us, is become our shame and punishment, or our lusts and desires are hard driven, or worn out.

(6.) *Lastly*, The dilatory ways we have of putting off this duty from time to time, nay, to the last expiring moments of our lives, is a slighting negligence, very disparaging to its worth and value, and in great likelihood may prevent its acceptance. For what reason have we to think God will accept of us then, when we refuse him now? or is it not most likely, that he will reject us then, when we have refused him after thousands of opportunities and invitations?

To parallel the case again, Should we tell a man to whom we owe a great sum of money, which we own upon his demands, that it is a due and just debt, and ought to be paid; but we are minded to make use of it ourselves as long as we live, and then he may have it if he please, or indeed, if any of it be left; would he not pronounce us dishonest, and knavish, and never to be trusted, and that if we could live for ever, we would never pay?

Repentance is by no means the great satisfaction

on, yet is it a certain conditional satisfaction required on our part; and deferring of payment is a plain declaring of our mind to God, that, for the present, we have use and occasion for our sins and our pleasures; but we will make all even with him at last: and the consequence of that declaration is as plain, that we would sin to all eternity, if we could continue in this state of flesh to all eternity. But while, for that and other reasons, the proper and adequate satisfaction is eternal misery, what a wild and mad venture is it to defer a minute, since we must needs guess how insolvent we are like to be when we come to leave this world? We may think ourselves as well able to run a race, or fight an enemy under the languishings of a consumption, or the tortures of a malignant fever, as to accomplish the mighty work of Repentance, and run thorough all its laborious exercises, when we are gaping for present life and ease, and our souls and spirits are exerting their utmost powers to keep alive the sinful body.

Both from the doctrine, and practice of our most mortified Saint, Repentance ought to be the most strenuous engagement of our whole lives, and bear date from the first commission and knowledge of sin, and we must bring forth fruits meet for Repentance, and old age and bodily infirmities are the most unlucky seasons and dispositions for fruitful productions. *The ax, saith he, is laid to the root of the tree, and execution must be done; if it bringeth not forth good fruit it must be hewn down, and cast into the fire, though it be it never so young of growth.* Repen-

Repentance must bear no delays, and it requires the strength and vigour of our age. He himself engages like a champion, with a rough raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins (*accingitur ad opus*) and with coarse and mean food of locusts and wild honey; because *every one that striveth for the mastery, must be temperate in all things*: And the lusts of the flesh are worse savages, than can be met with in a wilderness.

The whole engagement is represented to us in the Scripture, as a warfare and combat, and compared to every exercise and contest that is athletic and robust, that will put our courage and strength to the utmost tryal, that imports danger, and the assaults of mighty adversaries; and with this sense our Saviour's words may accord, *Matt. xi. at the 12th Verse. From the days of John the Baptist, untill now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.* Now, can we think to erect trophies upon our death-beds, and hope to conquer such virulent enemies as sin, and satan, when already thrown down by a violent disease? Can a stupid penitent that wants sleep, or is calling out every minute for his julep or cordial, to keep him from breathing out his last, be in a condition to perform all the offices of reflection and consideration, (for actual reformation, and bringing forth fruits, must now be abated and excused) so to disengage himself from the sins of his past life, as to bear up with a claim to his saviour's merits? Shall he that is deserted by his lusts and appetites, and
oft-times

oft-times by his common senses, because he ceases to sin, and says as plain as he is able to speak, that he will sin no more, be crowned with victory and glory; never be brought to an account or punishment for the sins of a long life, and infinitely rewarded for his last filthy groans?

It is indeed most certainly true, that even this deplorable estate cannot surmount the infinite mercies of God promised in Jesus Christ our Lord, nor exceed his Almighty power; for our Baptist allows (though so rigid in his penance) that *God is able out of stones to raise up children unto Abraham.* The one as well as the other must be very extraordinary and miraculous, and it is more than common presumption to trust to such a conversion.

Thus, I have endeavoured in some instances, (you may find out many more) to display before you our Uncleaness, in relation to our sins, and also to many of our religious performances. To be conceited of the contrary, is the likeliest disposition never to come to an enquiry, or a purgation. And among ourselves, conceitedness is looked upon as the most nauseous and disgusting quality that we can discover in any man: and must be much more so to God, who discries much more. Should the sinner be drawn in all his colours, and his hidden deformities laid open; and should the Pharisee, or pretended Saint, be undress'd of his religion, what monstrous spectacles of filthiness and brutality, would be added to the new discoveries of the world?

But

But, without judging of others, let us turn all enquiry upon ourselves: there we are best able to make discoveries. *If a man thinks himself, saith St. Paul, to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself: but let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone.* Gal. vi. 3, 4. The estimate, you know, that we must make, must be by the review or right judgment of God, which is the other part of the Text.

II.—*But the Lord weigheth the Spirits.* In proportion, I should enlarge upon this head as much as upon the former; but that will require longer time, and so must wait the next opportunity, only shall conclude with the general assertion of it.

It is a general concession which will easily be, made by all that acknowledge a God and his government over mankind, that he *weigheth the spirits*, the secret inclinations and dispositions of every man in his actings: that he *pondereth and searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins*: that he *seeth not as man seeth*; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart, and accordingly shall judge righteous judgment. This is his character all over the Scriptures, and our own reason cannot exclude this property from the rest of his infinitely excellent attributes.

I shall leave you therefore work enough, if I prescribe no more, than that you also should make a review and right Judgment of all your ways (which by your own reason and natural apprehen-

apprehensions of a God you may be able to do) that so your sins may every day lessen, and your religion encrease in purity and true holiness: that more especially, according to the advice of our Wiseman, you would *keep your hearts with all diligence; for out of them are the issues of life:* And lastly, for a constant awe upon all your actions, to make you consider before, or reflect after, that you would have always that apprehension upon your souls, that our God is an all-seeing God, and will one day bring us all to Judgment.

“ Cleanse our hearts and ways, O Lord, from
“ all unrighteousness, and renew a right
“ spirit within us; that it may be unto
“ life, and not unto condemnation; which
“ we beg for the sake of Jesus Christ, and
“ through the assistance of the Holy Ghost.
“ To whom, one God and three persons, be
“ ascribed all honour, might, majesty and
“ dominion henceforth and for ever more.
Amen.



SERMON VII.

PART II. God's Omniscience.

PROV. XVI. 2.

*All the ways of a Man are clean in his own
Eyes; but the Lord weigheth the Spirits.
— But the Lord weigheth the Spirits.*

NOT long since I discoursed from this place, upon the former part of these words; and then engaged to go through the latter: a subject of too great moment to be slighted or omitted, and a just debt ought to be paid, tho' it be forgot to be demanded.

It will sound like presumption, to say you may remember what I then advanc'd; it being the usual fate of better matter to be forgotten in less time. However it be, I shall make no repetition of what hath already been delivered; only to introduce this *second* part, barely recite the more necessary heads of enquiry that were made upon the *first*, concerning the pretended or conceited cleanness of our ways.

In order to the undeceiving ourselves in this case, and the rectifying the mistakes of our eyes, or our imaginations, by second thoughts, we fell in the *first* place upon the examination of our ways in relation to our sins; and amongst them we discover'd a great deal more of foulness than at first view we commonly find out. Our notions of guilt are very often adulterated, and many circumstantial but very considerable aggravations we overlook. Time and education, with other accidental occurrences, do vary our apprehensions of many transgressions, so that they rise and fall in our estimate of them according to the different prejudices we have contracted. And we likewise observed, how unfair and partial we are in respect to many sins; shewing the most favour to some, that will find the least with God; and satisfying ourselves with a certain zeal against some enormities, whilst we retain and indulge others with all complacence and forbearance; which, considering their malignity, their extensive mischievous effects, and also the habitual practice of them without any reluctance or remorse, will certainly meet with greater condemnation in the next world. Through the whole course of our conversations, the Pharisee's outside is still our fashionable cleanness, whilst inward purity is altogether disregarded; which is the vilest hypocrisy, and much the greater filthiness. Of these and the like foul dealings and prevarications, I gave several instances.

In the *second* place, we came to the examination

tion of our religious obligations and Christian duties, wherein our conceitedness and confidence ran very high, and from whence we ascribe to ourselves a more refined degree of purity and cleanness. But in the fundamentals both of faith and practice we discovered very foul and notorious deficiencies. As in believing, it is plain, our clearness and sincerity can never come up to our frequent and seemingly zealous professions of our faith which we make every day; because it is demonstrable in the affairs of the world, that men of common industry and consideration upon less persuasive motives do vigorously pursue their advantages of honour, or profit, or pleasure; and therefore our faith may very justly be suspected, and cannot be found at the bottom: and is it not a lamentable case that we are not yet got over our Creed? *Examine yourselves*, says the Apostle, *whether ye be in the faith*; and we can have no reason to think we are, till we live up to that Christian persuasion.

Again, Our prayers and devotions we look upon as the life of our religion; and that they may not die or languish, we are to keep them up by the rules prescribed in the holy Scriptures, and our necessities require, in constant exercise and vigour, to pray always without fainting and without ceasing; but, instead of that, incessant or never failing experience proves to us, how many and sensible are our failures and faintings in the performance of this duty; how little time we can afford for the exercise of it,

and how much of that scanty portion is diminished by our wandering thoughts and deviations: how apt the world and the flesh and all our enemies are to break in upon us, when we would seem to be in the closest communion with God. Again; Although the absolute condition of obtaining our petitions be an universal charity, a soul void of evil thoughts and resentments, and disposed to all offices of love and forgiveness, and likewise to all fair and righteous dealings one with another; yet how bold are we in our approaches to infinite mercy, when we will dispose of none ourselves? How clamorous and censorious against our neighbours, altho' we keep on our stated or wonted times of saying our prayers? Not unlike the Pharisee's loud invectives against the Publican at the very same time when he was addressing his God. And we bear up to near the same pattern, when we deceive and oppress, and yet pray: when we eagerly pursue all the designs of the mammon of unrighteousness, and yet at the same time would be thought most zealous in the service of God: As their prayers were ever longest and loudest and (as they would have them thought) most zealous, when they had a greedy designing eye and a devouring appetite towards the possessions of the innocent.

As among the Pharisees, so among us, our devotion will become the most sinful part of our lives, when so sacred a profession is only made use of, to serve the purposes of the world, and the lusts of the flesh; and Satan is ever bent upon

upon the greatest mischief, when he appears amongst the sons of God.

Another duty of the highest rank and quality in the Christian profession we called into question about its cleanness and integrity, and that was our Charity; to be manifested in that substantial testimony of its truth and sincerity, in giving of alms, which our Lord hath recommended for its cleansing nature: *Give alms of such things as you have, and behold, all things are clean unto you*, Luke xi.

41. But even this will become the most unfavoury oblation we can make to God, if it be the least tainted with any corrupt or sinister design: if we are liberal out of vain-glory, or to gratify a prodigal and ambitious humour, the charity cannot expiate for the pride, which is a sin of the same magnitude with avarice, or rather thereby enhanced, when we are at such expence to promote it. This was charged upon the Pharisees, who were both covetous and vain-glorious: but to be seen of men was their darling design, and so they sacrificed their covetousness to their pride; for which their charity was rejected as most nauseous and provoking in the sight of God, and was so much detested by our Lord that he did not spare to tell them of it, and justly expose them for it, whilst he was amongst them.

Another unfair and unseemly practice we observed often to accompany our charity, was, when we bestow our benefits with passion and forwardness: and here covetousness and liberality seem to be at a struggle, and tho' the latter be not quite worsted by the former, yet is it much diminished and debased; and the poor receiver all

the while hath but uncomfortable alms, and the giver too may find as comfortless returns for his charity : In fine, we must be very nicely clean in this most christian and noble dispensation of the good things of this life, for those purposes for which God hath intrusted them with us, upon many reasons that I have already given, and more especially upon that supposition that *St. Paul* makes, and which sometimes proves a very true position, that a *Man may bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and yet have no charity* : only a wild extravagancy to be profuse in good works, without any goodness of temper or disposition.

In the *last* place, We took to task our Repentance, which ought to fall under the strictest examination ; because it is a duty, that is to make all clean, to clear away all foulness and hypocrisy, and to correct as much as in us lies, all preceding errors and lapses, whether in faith or practice ; and because, if we miscarry here, all will be irrecoverably lost. Now this duty itself, that should be the more serious and substantial, is too often carried on with mere formality and specious appearances : the figure of a penitent, tho' many times very antick and ridiculous, and so represented by the prophet *Isaiah* and by our Saviour, goes a great way in the deception : and our frequent confessions, and prostrations of our sinful estate before God, are a farther advance, as we are apt to think. But this as yet is all but outward shew and grimace, and, if it enter no deeper, must be the most provoking hypocrisy : sin itself cannot be more loathsome, than
a mock

a mock humiliation. But farther yet, if the penitence do get more inward, and raise the resentments of the soul into some hatred of and sorrow for sin; yet we must not be too overconfident of our cleanness and integrity, till a confirmation be made by the following change of our lives: for tho' sorrow and hatred in this relation are most necessary and useful ingredients in this duty, yet those passions will be naturally rais'd when our lusts are down, and upon the punishment that attends or follows the sin: but our Repentance must be established in the persevering resistance of sin, when our desires are in their ascendancy, and when both temptation and opportunity do fairly offer themselves.

Another deception we likewise observed; That as we are partial towards our sins, so are we apt to be in respect to our Repentance, and spend more of our humiliations upon some single or less frequent transgression, that hath some way or other prov'd vexatious to us by scandal or other punishment, than upon others that have been habitual, and perhaps every act as heinous in the sight of God: this must lessen the whole performance, and be sure hazard the pardon of any of our sins. In a word, we ought not to acquiesce in any Repentance, or think ourselves clean at all, till we are quite pass'd over from the habits of sin and corruption, to the habits of virtue and holiness; or if time be not allowed for this proof by actual reformation, then must our Repentance be so sound and clean, that it

can pass the judgment and approbation of an all-discerning God: and for this there must be extraordinary grace in the assistance, and extraordinary favour in the acceptance, which ought not to be trusted to, lest we fall by a very unsafe presumption.

But I must no longer intrench upon the other part of the words, from whence we are to take the rule or measure of judging our own ways; and that is by considering with ourselves, how an all-seeing God, that cannot be deceived, or imposed upon, will judge of them: and so I come to the second general head. Which is

II. The review or right judgment of God,
---But the Lord weigheth the Spirits.

This expression lies easy to common apprehension, and needs not much explication; *weighing* and *pondering*, be sure, denotes the nicest exactness we can express; as, when we would know the just worth and value of many things, we cast them into a balance for the more certain trial and discovery. And *spirits* and *reins* as plainly denote the secret springs of all motion in the mind and heart of man; the most inward inclinations, and subtile designings of his soul, and whatsoever is transacted there (not subject to human view) before it passes into matter of fact: and both together do most fully express and comprehend whatsoever is to be understood in Scripture language, by *pondering* and *searching* the *hearts* and *trying* the *reins*. For *the Lord even weigheth the spirits*.

To

To make good this position, will be as much as need be said upon this subject: for to be fully convinced of this truth must be of mighty influence to cast an awe and dread upon us in all our secret thoughts and actions. Therefore it will lie upon me to produce all the evidences I am able for the confirmation of a doctrine of so great terror; and which thereby (if soundly believed) may become of so great benefit to us. And these evidences must arise from the most authentick origines. *viz.*

FIRST, From the light of natural Reason.
And

SECONDLY, From that of Revelation. As to the

FIRST, It is impossible we should frame to ourselves any rational conception or idea of a God, unless we attribute to him the perfection of infinite knowledge; and it is a contradiction to call it by that name, if it be limited or stinted, or shut out from the hearts of men. Nay, all other his attributes must be impaired in some relation or other, if we lop off this branch from what hath been ever called his Omniscience or knowledge of all things. As

(1.) His power can be no longer Almighty, if none be allowed him to descend into our minds, and inspect our thoughts and imaginations, and to discover upon occasion our designs and machinations upon their first rise, and controul and blast

blast them if he pleases, and when they are leveled against himself. The old world thought to have stood it against him: those sturdy *Giants*, as they are called, *Gen. vi. 4, 5.* who look'd upon themselves as mighty men, or men of renown, and able to hold it out against the Almighty himself, were timely discover'd and destin'd to destruction: because *God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

(2.) God's immensity and omni-presence, must as necessarily let him in to all the hidden corners and recesses of our souls, and the most secret retirements of our spirits. Can he fill all things, and is he present in all places? And will man pretend to any privilege place, exempted from his cognizance and jurisdiction? There is a sense indeed that must be allowed, and to the shame and misery of every wicked man, may be pronounced, *That God is not in all his thoughts*, but the concealment is never the nearer, for the same Prophet saith, *He seeth and knoweth them afar off*, *Pf. cxxxix. 2.* Tho' the filthiness and blasphemy of them may be so nauseous and forbidding, to discourage, as it were, what we call his immediate presence; yet they lie as open to his view, as any the most loathsome objects can be spread before ourselves to offend our eyes and nostrils, and to make us desire a greater distance. And *he is of purer eyes, than to behold iniquity* without resentment and indignation. And who can fly from his presence when he is angry? Should the rocks and

and mountains come to cover us at our call, they would not be sufficient to hide us, either from his sight, or from his wrath. Let us then look to our hearts, there are no secrets there can be kept from God, no privacies from his all-seeing eye. We may think ourselves safe and unseen in notion, and contemplation, in projecting and forming the plots and devices of wickedness; but all is as matter of fact unto him, and perfectly transacted in his presence.

(3.) The infinity of both his justice and goodness will be brought into question, unless he be acknowledged to search the hearts and *weigh the spirits* of men: for rewards and punishments are the most signal dispensations of those divine attributes; and how can he give out either with due weight and measure, but by an exact survey of all the inclinations and intentions of the mind and heart, by looking into the source and origine of all rational and animal motions within us, and observing their procedure into outward acts? By which he must infallibly judge of the aggravations and extenuations of all that is evil and sinful, and also of the true merit and intrinsic worth of all that is good and virtuous; and rightly distinguish the reality from the outward appearance.

Human justice doth oftentimes proceed with an erring hand, and its mercy is as often ill-bestowed; and so both are subject to unhappy but unavoidable mistakes, because of judging by the overt-act or outward appearance. But *the righteous Lord judgeth righteous judgment*, because *he weigheth*

weigheth the spirits, by which every action is design'd and done; and so must with an unerring hand appropportion and deal out to every man his just reward and punishment; which, if not visibly done in this world, shall with an unexceptionable exactness be accomplished in that which is to come.

Whatsoever other perfections and infinite excellencies distinguishable from these (to speak after the manner of men) we can ascribe unto God, must all in some relation or other be limited and circumscribed, unless we allow him an absolute and never failing knowledge of the hearts and minds of men; and that their most subtile spirits, by which they live and move, and think and act, are visible to his all-seeing eye.

All the attributes of God have been most sensibly exercised and manifested unto us in the creation and government of the world. As to the

1st. We can never suppose or believe that God created man, infused a soul and spirit into him, gave him all his faculties of thinking and reasoning, of devising and remembering and reflecting, and yet himself, his maker, should be kept a stranger to his own operations, and should not retain the power and privilege of discerning and inspecting the soul and spirit, which he made after his own image, and is a beam of his own light; no common artist can be kept in ignorance of the secret springs and wheels that put and keep in motion the machine of his own invention and composure.

That piercing eye that can penetrate to the
centre

centre of the earth, that can look through all the glorious orbs that make up the universe, and inspect and guide their most wonderful order and motions, into which he first cast them himself, cannot surely be obstructed, or shadowed off from viewing the movements of our little world. No such thoughts as this can be entertained in our hearts without absurdity and impiety; only to be abated upon that melancholick and self-denying consideration, we have from a great and humble king. *Lord! What is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?* Ps. viii. 4.

2ly. The attributes of God are likewise exercised, and daily illustrated to us, in his providence and government of the world; which surely we may allow (and with best safety to ourselves) to be arbitrary and uncontroulable. But how much must all his high prerogatives be limited and restrained in the exercise of them, if he can take no cognizance of the devices and counsels of men, till they come to open light, and are put in execution? What confusion must the world fall into, nay, how soon into destruction? had not the preventing providence of God, the irresistible and never-failing power of discovering, and confounding, the mischievous and murderous machinations and designs of wicked men, in bringing their counsels to nought, and making their devices of none effect? How successful would all plots and conspiracies be against sovereign powers? And what bloody execution might tyrants make upon their subjects? But we are secured

cured on all hands by him who is the supreme governor of both, and discovers every imagination of the heart, in the very instant of conception; and will suffer no design to proceed farther without his divine approbation or permission. *Tho' there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand;* says he, that was reputed the wisest of kings, *Prov. xix. 21.* And that was his security against the devices of his enemies; and he knew as well too, that no cabinet-council could exempt the heart, and deepest politicks of a prince, from the same over-looking and over-ruling power. For he tells us, *Prov. xxi. at the 1st verse. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water, he turneth it whither-soever he will.*

And so I come to the second evidence that was cited for the confirmation of this great truth.

SECONDLY, *That the Lord weigheth the spirits,* that the righteous God *tryeth the hearts and reins.* And *that* we must have from the greater light of revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures which we acknowledge to be of divine authority. And we may justly suspect that authority, if it did not maintain and set forth the truth of this doctrine. For to what purpose should God give forth his laws, to rule the hearts and spirits of men, which humane powers cannot reach? But that he very well knows their propensities and inclinations, and that all moral good and evil must take its rise from thence, and accordingly be brought to judgment.

The

The tenour of all the laws of God through the Scriptures, doth sufficiently confirm the truth of this doctrine, because no manner of obedience to them, can be accepted with him, but what must proceed from the integrity and sincerity of the heart, of which he alone can make the discovery. But there are likewise many express declarations of this high prerogative to rouse our consideration, and strike terror into our souls. *Solomon* at the dedication of his temple, invokes the blessing of God upon that and the congregation, by virtue of his great character, in *giving to every man according to his ways, whose heart, (saith he) thou knowest, (For thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men, 1 Kings viii. 39.)* And he had heard the same before from his Father *David* in his charge to him, about building an house for the Lord, as you read. *1 Chron. xxviii. 9. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* And he himself had therefore been preferred to the throne before all the sons of *Jesse*, who looked more personable to the outward eye, upon that distinguishing and infallibly discerning knowledge of God. *1 Sam. xvi. 7. For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*

All over the Book of *Psalms* * we meet with the like expressions; That *the righteous God tryeth the hearts and reins*; That he will search out the most hidden wickedness, for he *knoweth the secrets*

* Psalm vii. 9. Psalm xlii. 21.

secrets of the heart. Nay, that he *understandeth our thoughts afar off*: that he descries them at a distance, either before we are able to discern them ourselves, or else have quite forgot them: That no darkness hideth from him; but *the night shineth as the day; the darkness and light are both to him alike*; which allusion the Psalmist applies to God's most certain knowledge of his *most hidden secrets*. * For *thou Lord hast possessed my reins*; taken such full and entire possession, that no corner can escape his view and open discovery.

So likewise in this Book of *Prov. xv. 11. xxiv. 8. 12.* our Wiseman concludes the same truth from the like instance: *Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more then the hearts of the children of men?* And no design, or machination laid as deep as Hell, can be covered from his all-seeing eye. And so again, speaking of some mischievous persons and their devices which they think shall never be discovered, he remonstrates upon the case: *If thou sayest, Behold we knew it not: doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth the soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?* Where the same rational conclusion is intimated that we just now urged from the infinite justice and goodness of God. *viz.* That he must know the hearts and weigh the spirits of men, that thence he may render unto them according to their deservings: as the argument is more emphatically formed by the Prophet *Jeremy, chap. xvii. ver. 9, 10.*

upon

* Psalm cxxxix. 13.

upon a position that was made, and a question that was put: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

To trouble you with many proofs and quotations out of the new Testament would be unnecessary; for the tendency of that whole revelation was to bring religion close down to the heart upon that reason which should have prevailed before, but was remitted and loosened by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, *viz.* That no manner of service or worship can be acceptable to God, but what is done in purity of heart and spirit. For God is a spirit, and was so from everlasting; and must be worshipped in spirit and truth. Therefore was it the great business of our Saviour, through his whole conversation and preaching among them, to reduce those religious knaves, if it had been possible, to honesty in their profession, and to let them know, what they had brutishly forgot, or willfully slighted; that the life and vigour of all holiness and virtue must have both its rise and preservation from the good motions and dispositions of the heart. For this purpose he seems to have communicated this searching power and qualification to the divine word he left behind him; as though the same with himself; according to the Apostle, Heb. iv. 12, 13. *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the*

P joints

joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

It is a substantial testimony of our Saviour's divinity, that he was a searcher of hearts. This divine property, which, as we have observ'd, so much betokens infinity, and is inseparable from all the attributes of God, was never communicated to any created being. Satan indeed hath unhappily had too much intimacy with the hearts of men; there are many instances and allowances of it in the Holy Scriptures. As a very sagacious and subtle spirit and observer, he no doubt insinuates himself with his utmost politicks into the most inward dispositions of our souls, and discovers the strength and bent of our appetites and inclinations, and thereupon plies us with such temptations, allurements, and opportunities that he finds will take with us. But he hath no absolute knowledge, or uncontrollable power within us, unless we betray our own secrets. And he was notoriously out in all his guesses concerning *Job*, as well as baffled in all his projectings against him. But the son of God, whilst he was in the flesh, was never out in discerning and knowing the hearts of all he conversed with, as plain as their faces; ever discovered, and upon occasion, laid open all their inward resentments, their secret murmurings and ruminations; and did to the last, himself give information of all their plots and murderous designs

signs against him. *Behold!* (says he,) *The son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Lo! He that betrayeth me is at hand:* And therefore did not always so freely commit himself to them, till his time was come or near at hand. For which St. *John*, Chap. ii. at the two last verses, gives the reason: *Because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man:* a shrewd and severe remark upon the baseness and ingratitude of man, whom he came into the world on purpose to save.

And now our Lord, who is ascended into heaven with his humanity, and sitteth at the right hand of God, challengeth the same high prerogative by which he is qualify'd to judge all mankind, and that, in the foremention'd words of the Prophet *Jeremy* ascribed to God himself; as you have them, *Rev. ii. 23.* in his Epistle to *Thyatira*. *I am he which searcheth the reins and the hearts; And I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*

I have now done with the evidences we have of this great truth, that *the Lord weigheth the spirits*, from the testimonies of natural reason, and of divine revelation; I will only subjoin under these you have heard, two arguments more, and then come to a conclusion. The

First is, That the wisest Heathens and Philosophers, that ever spoke or wrote to any purpose concerning a God and religious worship, have maintain'd, That the prime and chiefest intimacy and communication the *Deity* hath with men, is with their hearts, and that the most acceptable

service and devotion must therefore come from thence. *Tully* tells us, that the best and chafest worship of the gods is, *ut eos semper purâ integrâ & incorruptâ mente veneremur*, 'that we must 'serve them with the purity and integrity of an 'uncorrupt mind.' And the Poet speaks of a composed temper and disposition of uprightness and honesty, in the most inward recesses of the soul, as preparatives for religious worship:

Hac cedo, ut admoveam templis & farre litabo.

'It matters not much tho' the sacrifice be the 'meaner, so it be offered with a clean and un- 'corrupted mind.' This then seems to be a natural and irresistible apprehension, which is inseparable from the notion and belief of a God, that *He searcheth the heart and weigheth the Spirits.*

The *other* additional argument I would sub-join, is the frightful apprehension which naturally men have upon the very start and first conception of any wicked design or enormous impiety; even whilst it keeps within its own inclosure, and goes no far ther than the heart; yet there is horror of mind and conscience, a jealousy and dread of some all-seeing eye, that is looking into the wicked secret; and is ready prepar'd with vengeance for execution: *Facti crimen habet*; it must amount to matter of fact in the sight of God, whilst it is projected and carried on within their breasts; only strength or courage or opportunity is wanted for execution.

But

But farther yet, Should the villainous design come forth into act, and succeed with the most unquestionable secrecy as to all possible discoveries from the world, yet the distrust and jealousy from the same all-searching eye rather encreases; till many times the wretched criminals betray themselves; and hasten their own punishment, because they cannot rid themselves of the fear of their being already discovered by an all-knowing God: even his Almighty power would strike no terror in to them, could they be secured that his all-seeing eye would bring in no information. This must likewise be an irresistible apprehension of some invisible power from whom nothing can be conceal'd; who will bring to light, and to judgment too, the most hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.

Now it may no doubt be thought, I have been all this while arguing and pressing with needless persuasives, a doctrine which is already own'd and acknowledged by all the professors of religion: but then certainly they do not argue it themselves, for the application must be unavoidable: They are most shie of all their wicked secrets, and aw'd in the practice of them, nay, quite kept off from it by the eye of the most despicable wretch, that may possibly be a spectator: what boldness or indeed madness is this, to think God should be their confident? tho' it be not their choice to make him so; yet in matter of fact they use him so, and thereby affront him to his face (for they have acknowledg'd his pre-

sence) and dare his infinite justice and power to vindicate his own laws and honour that are violated before his eyes.

Let us then look to our hearts and to our ways, God will keep none of our vile secrets, there must be a day of revelation and discovery, when our own consciences shall also appear against us; and a time too, when the disgrace and infamy of our sins, which we now are so much affrighted at, will be much more dreaded, as we become more sensible both of the scandal and of the crimes, and when a publication of both shall be made to the whole world.

Let us then treat God, but as we treat man in this matter: for shame let us forbear all foul thoughts and practices, for he stands by and looks upon us, which perhaps we would not have any man do for all we are worth in the world. There is a certain respect and reverence that is due to all men, which obliges us in common manners to a seemly and circumspect behaviour before them. And we look upon those as the most impudent and profligate of all sinners, that dare to put in practice their foulest enormities in the open view of the world; hypocrisy in such sins is but decency. What apprehension then ought we to have of our slighting, disrespectful, and our most provoking behaviour in this case; when the eye of the world shall strike us with greater dread and terror than that of an all-seeing God?

In a word, if fear and circumspection in all our ways and walkings will not be concluded from our belief of this great fundamental of our religion,

ligion, that God searcheth the hearts and *weigheth the spirits*, and is an eye-witness to all our most secret thoughts and actions; this will be a conclusion that must be unavoidable, that it will turn to the greatest aggravation both of our guilt and of our condemnation, that we have all our lives professed our faith in an omniscient and omni-present God, yet have dared to do any thing that might incense his Almighty power to inflict his everlasting wrath and vengeance upon us.

God of his infinite mercy give us the greater help of his holy spirit (more powerful than both our reason and faith) that we may always so behave ourselves as in his presence; that he himself may be delighted in our conversations, and we thereby prepared and qualified for the society of Saints and Angels, and to dwell with him to all eternity, which we beg for the sake and through the merits of Jesus Christ our only Lord and Saviour.
Amen.



SERMON VIII.

On PRAYER.

PHIL. IV. 6.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by Prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

WHATSOEVER may be the distrust of some men, in relation to this advice; that it is cold and comfortless, will neither feed nor cloath us, and of much less efficacy to lift up a disconsolate and drooping spirit: Yet we cannot but observe, that generally men in great distress, when hard driven by their misfortunes, do fly to this expedient for their relief: When their difficulties seem to be inextricable, and they have no hope or prospect of help or succour from the world: When ungratefully (as they be sure will term it) forsaken by their friends and acquaintance, and unjustly born down by their enemies; then heaven must present

presently be alarm'd with their prayers and supplications: and who! but God that is just, and merciful, and powerful (as they begin now to acknowledge) can right and support their sinking cause, and defend them from the violence and injuries of wicked men? Who else is able to ward off the blow and calamity so likely to fall on them, and to fix them in a secure and undisturb'd estate? Thus the boldest sinners, tho' they have long stood out in pride and defiance, are oft-times at last brought upon their knees; it is happy, if it be not too late.

Now surely this must be some natural instinct, or rather a strong impulse from our reason and understanding, which for our preservation and refuge puts us upon this thought: that help and relief in all streights and difficulties must be sought from Heaven: that we must apply ourselves to our maker, if our beings are any ways out of frame or disorder, or our well-beings threatened or in any danger. So that Prayer is the genuine dictate of common nature and reason, according to that of holy *David. Psal. lxxv. 2. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.*

But here lies our unfairness and unworthiness in relation to this duty, so much suggested by natural reason, and much more enforced by our religion. We commonly make it our last flight and shift, and are not early in our application to him, who is the giver of all good things, and can alone preserve us in the enjoyment of them, as well as guard us from the evils we are surrounded

rounded with, and deliver us or pull us out of the miseries, in which, by our own follies and walking contrary to his laws, we have involved ourselves.

It is no marvel that God no sooner hears, when we come to him by compulsion and in forc'd humiliations. No executions would be made, very few penalties would be inflicted by human justice, were the strong cries and groans of malefactors always or easily prevailing.

Therefore the text imports the early and timely, the habitual and persevering practice of this duty; and then we may lay aside all care, and be good husbands too; that is, all concern for this world, but what may be sufficiently managed and carried on in subserviency to our religion, and with great success, if we duly make our application to God in prayer. *Be careful for nothing*, &c. In which words we have,

I. That which looks like an express command: *Be careful for nothing*.

II. We have a method prescribed, and that an infallible one, if we dare trust to divine authority, how we may do much better in the world without so much of our own worldly cares; if in all necessities and distresses whatsoever, or under the fears of either, *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving our requests be made known unto God*.

III. From the whole, we shall consider the

the success of this method : How far *prayer* and *supplication* with *thanksgiving* may prove sufficient to produce the happy effects implied in the Text, without so much of our own sollicitous cares,

I. *First*, We have the command, which runs very strict; or rather very loose as the worldling will imagine : *Be careful for nothing*. Which must therefore be interpreted with some allowances and abatements, like those other commands as express in the Gospels : *Take no thought of your life, or for the morrow; lay not up treasures upon the earth; sell that ye have and give alms*, and others of the same import : where men are not commanded to renounce all their own providence, because they may safely trust in God's; to throw up all their cares and estates too, and expect subsistence from miracles. For then they would not be reconcileable with other very Christian precepts that injoin labour and industry, and abiding in our callings, to make necessary provisions for ourselves and families; nor indeed with reason and the unavoidable necessities of our human estate, in which the providence of God hath fixed us; so that not only private interest (so much I mean as must necessarily be consulted), but that of the publick too is preserv'd and kept forward by the diligence and providence of men in their several stations and vocations. Therefore was it impossible, that Christ and his Apostles who were so tender of civil societies, should preach up ill husbandry, which begets a dissolute life, or such a relaxa-

relaxation from worldly cares, as could prove no less than a dissolution of all secular government and polity.

What is then forbidden in the text is that anxious solicitous care that is usually the torture of our souls, and in all its restless movings promotes nothing, even towards its own ends *. It is that greedy worm (oftentimes as tormenting as that in the conscience; and he is some times gnawed upon by both) that feeds upon the entrails, and very vitals of the covetous man, and makes him to raven after that which he hath no appetite to enjoy, but only to possess, and to pine and languish (as you may often see by his careful looks) tho' he is always craving and devouring. It hath two very ill origines and many cursed effects.

First, It proceeds from a sole trust and confidence in our selves and our own managements, which God can never allow of, who knows what poor contributors we are to our own well-being, and how small a blast from heaven will make all our projectings and undertakings unfruitful, or turn to very little account. And,

Secondly, From a total distrust in God, by which we think that showers of heavenly blessings are very rare and uncertain effects of prayer, and therefore no trust is to be had in the operation: And so whatsoever good things come to our hands, they are the product of our own industry and politick management, or the lucky hits of our own good fortune. And thus the over-

ruling

* *Movet, sed nihil promovet.*

ruling providence of God is cast out, or wholly disregarded; and second causes and chance carry away all the acknowledgments: which as it is base and ungrateful, so must be highly incensing and provoking to an Almighty sovereign power, that takes such especial care of us, and knows our own will not do.

When God had made the *Israelites* so prosperous and rich, *Moses* takes care to set them right in their accounts and acknowledgements. *Deut. viii. 17, 18.* that they should not say in their Hearts, *my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.* But, *remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.*

As this solicitous care forbidden hath two such evil origins, an unwarrantable trust to our selves, and a very ungrateful and disobliging distrust of God, so doth it produce many horrid effects; but I shall name but two, which are the complex of innumerable more. (1st,) A total indisposition to religion, by which we shut off all communication with God. (2^{dly},) As great an indisposition to charity, by which we shut up all bowels of mercy against our neighbours.

(1.) From this anxious and superfluous care of the world arises a total indisposition to religion. Not but that the worldling commonly reckons himself of the upper rank of serious and religious men; and upon all occasions expresses his zeal, either in words or by the grave motion of his head, against the vices of the age, (his own always excepted) for they are very crying and heinously expensive. But of all sinners,

ners, he is the most wretchedly mistaken, in assuming to himself more godliness than his fellow transgressors: For his sin above all others must have full possession of the mind and heart, which are the chief or only seats and mansions of all religion: It is so selfish and churlish, that it will suffer no cares or concerns superiour to its own to abide there; nay, not so much as to interfere or to have any copartnership in its designs.

Therefore do we meet with such severe and positive determinations in scripture relating to this sin; that *we cannot serve God and mammon*: As to God, he will allow us in the fair and moderate use and concerns of the world: But mammon will bear no competitor, God must quit all to him.

On the same account is it pronounced as next to an impossibility for a rich man to be saved; not but riches may prove an help and an advantage towards that great end, a temporal talent and trust put into our hands, of which we may make the greatest spiritual improvements. It is impossible, riches of themselves, that are reckoned among the choicest of God's temporal blessings, should prove the greatest of curses, which is damnation. Our Lord therefore relaxes the sentence, *Mat. x. 24.* when the disciples were astonished, perfectly frightened at these words; he explains himself, and saith unto them, *Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven!* Where the principal of our trust is reposed, be sure there goes all

our devotion. What religion can that man have, who putteth his trust in his riches? And therefore again, *covetousness* by St. Paul is branded no less than twice with the name of *idolatry*; not purely figuratively, as other sins may be called so, for being the most preferable objects of our inclinations and desires: The voluptuary may be said to make a * god of his belly, and the wanton and lascivious person to adore the object of his lust: but neither settle their faith or confidence in either; as the worldling always doth in his treasure. Besides, other sinners have their intervals, wherein they hate and loath their satiating pleasures, and call out for a cessation and respite: But the man of worldly cares is a constant an incessant devotee, and even the allowable and necessary refreshments of nature, shall not interrupt his homage to the mammon of unrighteousness.

Thus there is a total indisposition to religion in those (more sensibly prevalent and visible than in any other sinners) that wholly give up themselves to the cares of this life. They have espoused a quite different interest, and all their devotion must go that way: and this proves the absolute necessity of ridding our selves in the first place of all our troublesome and immoderate cares, before we offer to make known our requests unto God; it being the grossest absurdity or down-right madness to think of praying without religion.

(2.) These vexatious cares of the world are also

* Phil. iii. 19.

also according to their wont, so unreasonable and unconscionable, as not only thus to shut off all communication with God; but likewise shut up all bowels of mercy towards our fellow brethren.

When they have taken full possession of the heart, it is hard for friend or neighbour (if that relation can be supposed) to find any room there: If God cannot be admitted, there must be small hopes for his distressed creatures. *Go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven,* says our Lord to that hopeful and towardly young man in the gospel, who had great possessions, and a great deal of religion too as he thought; but he slides away with regret and sorrow, that true genuine virtue and complete holiness, which he had enquir'd after, should be so extreme chargeable, that his estate must be sold or very much dip'd and encumbered with charity to make him a good and perfect man; altho' one of the commandments that he had kept from his youth (as he vaunted) was, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*: But he could by no means endure the exposition, the prodigal testimony that was required of his obedience to it: That havock must be made of his estate, for the maintenance or relief of the poor and distressed, and such as were always in his esteem the meanest and most despicable of the people. Hereupon it was, that the forementioned dreadful sentence was drawn up against all rich, that is, against all selfish, ill-natured, and inhospitable worldlings, who would have providence

dence as partial as themselves, and allow none to be the better for their abundance ; tho' their possessions are but a trust for the use of others as well as for their own.

Wherever our Saviour speaks of *laying up treasures in heaven*, the metaphor is directly adapted to this peculiar duty of doing works of charity upon earth ; but the men of earthly cares have no faith in those remote funds, they will venture no farther than this world, and be sure *where their treasures are, there will their hearts be also*.

Thus you see the anxious and solicitous cares of the world, must of necessity be cast away, otherwise we shall fail in the two great fundamentals of all moral and religious obligation, *viz.* Our duty towards God, and our duty towards our neighbour : And then it is impossible that our prayers should be of any prevalence, when God shall have nothing else of our service, nor our neighbour any thing at all of our substance.

But the injunction in the text doth not only exclude worldly cares from the benefit of praying, but all other unnecessary troubles and anxieties, that upon many occasions oppress our souls, and prove very pungent and grievous, which cannot be looked upon as so sinful as the other, but are commonly more pityable, and so have a better claim to redress. Yet are they such as are ever attended with a diffidence and distrust in God, and also some impatience and uneasiness that matters are not brought about according to our minds, or soon enough for our hasty expectations ; by which our souls must be

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in some confusion and disorder, and so unqualified to make our addresses unto God. In relation to those of this nature, as well as to the other, the Apostle's advice is intended for redress. The poor Christians in St. *Paul's* time had not much of worldly possessions to disturb or take up their thoughts, and had they had never so much, were by general prescript and practice of their religion, to give up all when the cause of Christ should require it of them: And there were daily occasions in the Church, out of that little they had, for their charitable contributions to the relief of their poorer brethren, and those that were in prison, or in any distress for the sake of the gospel; as St. *Paul* himself in particular had been, which you may perceive in the chapter, before you. He cheers up their liberality with assurance, that their own prayers shall make up all their disbursements, *be careful for nothing, &c.* and ver. xix. *my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.* Likewise the same advice, if followed, would bear them over all their afflictions and persecutions they should meet with under their christian profession; so that they may become matter of exceeding joy, because the *Lord is at hand*; as you read in the two verses preceding the text, and in that following; they may thereby be assured of peace and contentment without their own solicitous cares: For *the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep their hearts and minds through Jesus Christ*: Even the same Jesus that was persecuted in his own person, and fol-

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followers upon earth, hath the sole interest in the Kingdom of heaven; and the surest interest we can make with him is, through his name, by *prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto God.* And this in the second place brings me to

II. The method prescribed, and that an infallible one, if we dare trust to divine authority, how we may do much better in the world, without the expence of our own worldly cares, if in all necessities and distresses, or under the fears of any, by *prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, our requests be made known unto God.*

And now at this time of *Rogation* * are we more especially to exert ourselves in all prayers and supplications, with humiliations and fastings too, according to an ancient practice, to appease God's wrath, and deprecate his vengeance, for the averting those judgments which the sins of a nation have justly deserved: And that he might be pleased to bless the fruits of the earth, which are now in their verdancy: And turn from us those scourges of his hottest displeasure and indignation, pestilence and war, which ordinarily begin at this season. Prayer is our only fence against all such judgments; and the proper and even indispensable means of obtaining mercy and forgiveness: And will we not submit to the easiest condition that can be required of us? always to pray that we may be always blessed.

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* This Sermon was preached at Christ-Church Canterbury, on Rogation Monday, 17 101.

For Prayer is the high privilege of mankind, and God himself, to whom all prerogative and uncontrollable dominion belongs, is most tender of this our privilege and fundamental right of petitioning, in establishing and encouraging it, and being determined even by our prayers. Crowds of petitioners will be no annoyance to his throne, and the most persisting importunity gives him no disturbance, but is that placid violence which takes heaven by force. Angels themselves are but ministering spirits in constant waiting to attend upon our addresses and the returns of blessings: And be sure then the divine Majesty will never allow our prayers and supplications to be made to them, or the most glorious Saints; when it is to himself the most delectable service: And none of those sublime beings which surround his throne, had they power to hear and answer, are of more easy access than himself. Besides, so many virtues and christian graces attend the right performance of this duty, that make it the most acceptable and complete part of his worship, and must therefore peculiarly be reserved to himself. And tho' he knows our necessities before or without our asking; yet express asking is necessarily and absolutely obliging, because it implies an entire acknowledgement of all his attributes and perfections, as also a deference and resignation to all his determinations.

Epicureans and Stoics would never pray, and why should they? What obligation or comfort can there be in the performance, to those who out of respect, as they pretend, or rather

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suspecting the extent of his power and knowledge, will not allow the Deity to be concerned in the little affairs of mortal men? or to those, more especially, who before-hand have concluded all things relating both to this world and the next, to have already passed under a fatal and irrevocable decree: *For he that cometh unto God, must believe that he is; and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him:* And then by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, he will make known his requests unto him.

It will be unnecessary, and too much for my time, and not required by my text, to engage in going through this large and very expensive subject of prayer and praise: For both natural and revealed religion, which do so powerfully incite us to the exercise of this duty, have not left us at a loss in the matter and manner of our application unto God: And I will not presume to teach you how to pray; for in that our Lord hath most perfectly instructed the whole christian world: And he that dares to pray without such a form and direction in publick, is a very bold and presuming petitioner in the presence of almighty God; and a very impudent *babbler*, (I have the word from the son of *Syrach*, *Ecclus. vii. 14.*) in the face of any congregation.

What you have in the text, amounts to a definition of Prayer, *viz.* That it is, together with thanksgiving in all things, a making known our requests unto God: And tho' we meet with it set forth more at large, yet little more is implied; as that it is an application of the soul to God,

representing to him its desires to obtain those benefits we want; and also its pleasing and grateful sense of those benefits we have already received. And this lies plain and easy to every man's apprehension: So that I have no more to do than to lay before you the necessary qualifications and dispositions requisite for the right performance of this great duty; and then to account for the success.

1. One necessary disposition must be, that tho' according to the previous injunction in the text, those troubling and distracting cares of all sorts, the never failing hindrances of all devotion, are to be cast away; yet we must be ever careful in the exerting and putting forth all our both natural and moral endeavours, towards the attainment of what we pray for: For God hath no kindness at all for the idle and sloathful, such as will no way contribute to their own relief and support, besides begging.

Pity is an infirmity and imperfection, peculiar to weak and abject natures (very unsuitable to Divine wisdom and goodness) when cast upon those that are resolved to make and continue themselves, the wretched objects of it. Such are like common beggars, the most unpitiable miscreants, that are earnest and pressing, as well as clamorous in their petitions, but will be set upon no employment, requiring labour or industry, to get that by right, which by their outrageous begging, they do as 'twere outrageously wrest out of other mens hands. In this case importunity will never prevail, but most certainly provoke; for

for, to throw upon God the worthless labour of our lips, and deny him that of our hands and of our minds, is the most preposterous way of making our prayers to him, or in the most proper sense, saying them backwards : We do not begin right, but presumptuously call down for miracles, unless we pray for God's blessings upon humane means and endeavours ; that our labour and industry, the prudent and sober management of our affairs, may be prosperous by the concurrence of his providence : Because we cannot but know by experience, that designs laid with the deepest policy, and carried on with the most wary conduct and strenuous prosecution, are often times blasted and come to nought, when we have not duly bespoken the favours and benedictions of heaven.

We are invited (tho' it looks bold to take the offer) to cast our burdens upon the Lord, and he will sustain us ; but not in that rigid and enslaving sense, as not to stretch forth our own hands to help ourselves, or so much as to lay hold on his assistance. No ; We must do our own business as far as we can ; and it is sufficient, if upon our prayers it will be happily forwarded, and at last accomplished by the providence of God. It's true indeed, by the order of the same providence, blessings in wonderful affluence have fallen down upon them that are not us'd to pray at all, nor have put forth any other endeavours for the attainment of them. What therefore I mean by the necessity of human endeavours, is, for the use of them that do pray : That, as they have great trust in the performance of that duty, and hope to succeed, so God requires they should not fail

in the exerting their own abilities, by such honest and industrious means as are conducive for the bringing about those good ends and purposes, which they are farther promoting by their prayers.

And as thus in temporal blessings, so likewise in spiritual (where indeed our abilities to do for ourselves are much less) we must at least take care to dispose ourselves for the reception of them. God's grace, and holy spirit, which he most freely gives (and we cannot ask amiss in spirituals, as we often do in temporals) will not make a forcible entry; but desires fairly to be admitted by our reason and understanding, which may dispose our wills and affections to a conformity to what we have received.

When the great descent was made upon the Apostles and Disciples, as of a mighty rushing wind, it was when they were in preparation for the reception, when they had continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, *Acts* i. 14. and were arguing out of the scriptures that things must so be, and ordering their matters against the Holy Ghost should come upon them!

And now these great manifestations are past and gone, and not to be expected over again, we have much greater employment for our rational faculties in this great work, to join with our prayers and supplications for the building up our most holy faith. And christianity desires no fairer dealing than to be search'd and examined into; sound reason, if it be free and unprejudiced, will never be its enemy.

If we cherish infidelity, and love to dally with novel and sceptical notions, as we meet them in vile

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books, or more paultry company, and pride ourselves in the venting of them; prayer will be but a weak ordinance, till we get on the other side the question, and dispose our selves fully to weigh and consider the evidences that are on the believing part; because there it is, our deepest concern lies, and we cannot be deceived to any loss: Whereas the Atheist (by living as such) can be no gainer, tho' every one of his principles prove true.

So again, when we pray against temptation, we can hope for no security, unless we take care not to lie in the way of sin; that we shun vitious company and opportunities, and consent not to sinners that entice us: Then God will come in upon our prayers and supplications, with all succour and relief, to guard us against all the enemies of our souls. It is the greatest invitation to God's grace, when we put forth our own natural strength and abilities; for in truth we make our selves too unweildy for God's help, if we draw the contrary way; if we do not exert our utmost strains to concur with his assistance, and in prudence shun those evils and dangers that our reason can inform us will be rocks or precipices in our way: Brutes, purely by the instinct of nature, will avoid every thing that hath a tendency to their ruin. When we have made our own moral efforts towards the obtaining of grace and mercy, and the avoiding of temptation and sin, tho' but weak and insufficient in themselves, yet will be strongly invigorated by our persevering applications to the throne of God's grace, who

who ever lifts up but never casts down; who breaks not the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax, and will abundantly send forth his spirits in defence and offence, if we do not quench or resist him our selves. In a word, praying for spiritual blessings is the most acceptable devotion, unexceptionable as we may say; it is praying according to his will, and he hath promised to hear us (1 Jo. v. 14). And therefore when these are not granted, it must be, because we do not reach forth our own strength towards the obtaining of those graces we every day pray for, and he must ever delight to give: Whereas in temporal blessings, the failure may be frequent, because he kindly not gives, but what passes the approbation of his wisdom and goodness (for we are the worst judges, even of our own good) and so he answers our petitions best, when he hath denied the benefit we ask'd, but done that for us, which after-experience hath seldom failed to convince us, was much better than our own option.

2. Another preparative qualification, or disposition, must be our Faith; without it, *it is impossible to please God*, says the Apostle, *Heb. xi. 6.* and to come unto him, or pray unto him, and not to believe his being, must be a contradiction, or an absurdity of worship more gross than that of idolatry. Not that a complete faith, or an explicate belief of all the articles of christian religion, can always be required as an absolute previous disposition for prayer; because that cannot be a preparative to it, which so frequently may

may be the subject matter of it, as we have too often occasion to pray; *O Lord, increase our faith, Lord, help our unbelief!* And an heathen's prayer cannot but be acceptable to God, that earnestly desires to be enlightned in the true religion. *Cornelius's* both prayers and alms ascended up to heaven for a memorial before God, even before his conversion was wrought; so that so much as makes up a natural faith, or a belief of the first article of our creed, may be sufficient to let us in to the privilege of prayer; and as we rise higher, and come to a perswasion of the christian religion, whose articles are all the most endearing and enravishing truths, our prayers will be actuated with new life and vigour, especially when the name and interest of the Son of God most high is assigned over to us, to be freely used and pleaded in our petitions; and who for that end sits at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us.

Faith will make our prayers most affectionate and fervent, and the exercise of the duty which otherwise must be heartless and hopeless always delightful, when it brings along with it the assent both of our understandings and our wills: And then God will gratify us in all our reasonable desires, and with-hold no good thing from us, because a sound faith will with-hold nothing from him. And therefore is the promise so absolute in the gospel, *Mat. xxi. 22. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.*

Indeed the immediate conferring of blessings upon

upon prayer is, as 'twere, a certain standing miracle in the church, *viz.* That upon making known our request to him in prayer and supplication, a blessing should presently descend upon us. But even that Almighty power, when exerted in the most glorious testimonies, to confirm and establish the Christian religion, was subject to a check from the infidelity of the people, *Mat. vi. 5.* It is said of Christ, *that he could do no mighty work in his own country, because of their unbelief:* And be sure then in the more ordinary dispensations of benefits, no grants will be made from heaven, unless we bring in true testimonials of our faith.

And this faith is the more insisted upon, without which it is impossible to please God, or to pray at all; because it denotes not only a positive belief of a God, and the revelation of his will, but also a confiding trust (with submission and resignation) to his power, wisdom, and goodness, which is as 'twere an obligation laid upon heaven to do what is best for us. *Commit thy works unto the Lord,* says the Wiseman, *and so shall thy thoughts be established,* Prov. xvi. 3. And so his Father before him, *Pf. xxxviii. 5.* *Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass.* And *Eliphaz* an heathen, before them both, and by the dictates of nature in both reproof and advice to *Job*, chap. xxii. tells him: *If thou return to the Almighty, and make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established; and the light shall shine*

shine upon thy ways ; an Oriental expression, to denote the happiest success. Let us then see to it, that our faith be set right, and be kept up in its full power, both in a sound belief and an entire trust in God, and then our prayers shall not fail of the best effects, if we will abide by the judgment of God.

3. He that is thus actuated in his devotions by *faith*, will not easily fail in any other condition that is required of him, to set him fair in the esteem of God, that he might not miss the blessing he is suing for ; therefore, he will take care to set his own *charity* right, that it might most nearly resemble that goodness of God, to which his addresses are more peculiarly directed. To desire good things of the Lord, and to bestow none himself upon others, must certainly be upon a presumption that God hath not yet found him out, or else giving a challenge to his justice.

When that great Lord in the gospel, *Mat. xvii.* had remitted a considerable debt to one of his chief servants upon his falling down before him, and worshipping him, as the text expresses it, and begging his patience and forbearance, he could imagine no less, than that he would be as kind to his fellow-servant on the like occasion : But hearing another account of him, he renews his claim, and delivers him over to the tormentors : So likewise shall our heavenly Father (as our own Lord makes the application) do unto us ; that is, if under the constant fruition of his mercy, and the innumerable instances of his patience,

tiense, we cannot in giving and forgiving, and in all other mutual acts of charity, be kind and good-natur'd one towards another.

God's forbearance can hold out to the last minute of our provocations ; but that our own is so often and easily worn out towards our fellow-brethren : Then we necessitate his justice to break out into immediate fury and vengeance ; and we bear too hard upon his goodness (our prayers surely must be affronting and incensing) when we implore it, but will never dispense any of our own.

Our Lord upon that petition in his own prayer, *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*, makes a particular comment in words most express and emphatical, as a law of inviolable equity not to be dispensed with by infinite goodness, not to be remitted by infinite justice, *Mat. vi. 14. 15. and Mar. xi. 25. For, if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you : But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* The condition is so very reasonable so highly equitable, that we may even question the injustice of God, should he pardon and forgive on other terms ; that is, when the two cases are put together, and we are begging pardon, but will give none ourselves ; have millions of debts and injuries to be discounted and remitted, or we perish everlastingly ; and cannot pass over without resentments, and oftentimes fury and vengeance (if in our power) the petty affronts and trespasses we meet with from the world ;
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when ourselves too are as apt to give them as we are impatient to receive them. *Leave thy gift before the altar, and go and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift,* is our Saviour's command, *Mat. v. 24.* Let there be an entire cessation of all religion, till peace and reconciliation be made. How strictly cautious are some people (as they may well be) of going to the altar, when they are at any variance with their neighbours; but let them know that their daily prayers too may e'en as well be left off, and all other pretended acts of devotion laid aside, so long as they indulge and resolve to retain this malevolent temper in their hearts.

Malice is the most unhappy disposition for prayer; it puts in an exception to every petition, and enters a caveat against the pardon of their own sins; it banishes all charity from their hearts, without which all religion is vain; it rouses the vindictive justice of God, and enflames all the accusations of guilt that can be charged upon their own souls, because they will not discharge others.

4. Indeed we ought to be *clean* throughout, to make our prayers of never failing prevalence. Therefore doth holy *David* often call out for *a clean heart and clean hands*, to be lifted up in prayer and *thanksgiving*. *Psal. xxiv. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in his holy place?* that is, in the performance of these holy exercises; why, *he that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully: He shall*

shall receive the blessing of the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. In fine, God heareth not sinners: *If I regard iniquity in my heart,* says the Psalmist again, *the Lord will not hear,* Ps. lxvi. 18. Nay, *he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be abomination,* says Solomon, Prov. xxviii. 9. *but the prayer of the upright is his delight:* And *the Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous:* And says our Lord Christ, *John ix. 31. If any man be a worshiper of God* (truth and sincerity is implied) *him he heareth.* Innumerable are the declarations we have from God himself in his holy word, that it will be in vain to pray, if we resolve to sin: An habitual course of impiety, and an habitual formality of devotion, so visible in the lives of some People, is so unfair a division of our services, that be sure God will accept of none of his share.

One secret sin wilfully indulged and cherished makes all devotion a mere mockery to heaven: But when the cry of our transgressions drowns that of our prayers, then our very petitions do but hasten execution: Hypocrisy and prophana- tion of the name of God are unluckily superad- ded, to enhance the guilt and provocation.

5. We must by no means omit the requisite condition in the text, which is ever indispensably obliging; and that is, gratitude or *thanksgiving*; a natural debt to all favours. Prayer and sup- plication will be coldly received without giving of thanks; because it is impossible we should

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set a right value upon the blessings we are so pressing for, unless we are grateful upon the receiving. It is too plain a sign that we imagine they come another way, and not from God, if we are tardy or forgetful in returning him thanks. Zeal and fervency must be shewn here, as well as in our supplications: nay, if we truly value the blessings and the donor, and esteem ourselves happy in the receiving, we cannot surely but be raised into transports of grateful and joyful praise and thankfulness. *Perseverance* also is required in this duty as well as in supplication: as we are to pray always and without ceasing; so no doubt, as high as that injunction rises, are we always to be giving of thanks: Holy *David* conjoins the obligations, *Psal. lxxii. 15. Prayer shall be made unto him continually, and daily shall he be praised.* And our Apostle *Eph. v. 19, 20.* enjoins the continuance of praise *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; giving thanks always in all things unto God and the Father, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We know how base and vile ingratitude is, in our own esteem, one towards another: you can say nothing worse of a man, *ingratum si dixeris*; and surely it is greater unworthiness towards God, and he must severely resent it. And yet is this duty of praise and thanksgiving at all times but poorly performed, and in memorable blessings seldom above once; and by some not at all. *Where are the nine?* says our Lord, when he had healed ten lepers, and but one return'd to give thanks.

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We are grossly impolitick in the slight and but formal exercise of this grateful devotion, the pious and persevering practice of which must be necessary to lay in for future blessings, as also for the continuance of those we have already receiv'd. It is therefore the most eminent part of divine worship and service; God must wonderfully be delighted with it, in the grateful hearts and tongues of his servants here below, when it is the whole devotion of his worshipers above. Prayer and supplication relate only to this wanting world, and must cease; but praise and thanksgiving, like love and charity, shall abide for ever: it is the glorious work of Saints and Angels to all eternity; everlasting thanksgivings! and yet still not sufficiently commensurate to the everlasting mercies of God.

6. *Lastly*, When our prayers are rightly ordered by the foregoing dispositions and qualifications, let us take care to keep our zeal forward by persistence and importunity. For this is very obliging to God, tho' it doth not always please our superiors upon earth.

When our Lord was teaching his Disciples to pray, and had concluded that most divine and comprehensive form, *Luke xi. 5.* he brings in a parable to invigorate perseverance in our addresses, *viz.* How one friend prevailed upon another, altho' his request was very unseasonable, if not also somewhat unreasonable: but importunity gain'd the point, where common friendship would have fail'd; *ver. 8. Tho' he would not give him because he is his friend, yet because*
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of his importunity, he will give him whatsoever he needeth. So again, *Luke xviii. 2, 3.* A female solicitor is brought in, by way of parable, wearying out an unrighteous judge, (*which feared not God, nor regarded man,*) into mercy and good nature, and to do her justice: tho' the comparison doth not quadrate in all points, yet what was to be represented is very exprefs; *viz.* That the most righteous judge of heaven and earth is ever delighted, and never troubled or disturb'd with the incessant applications of his people; and will grant their petitions, even the more, upon that very application, when they will no otherwise be answer'd.

Our injunctions in this case are very strict; *that we should pray always, and without ceasing,* and what we sometimes find very difficult, *without fainting* too. We have no such command for other duties, nor could the obedience be possible: but here a perpetual communication may be kept up with heaven, without disturbance to our lawful business and employments, and without disturbance to any other christian duties; our souls may be employed in a certain mental prayer and thankful acknowledgments, in a continued elevation of our hearts unto God, in pious soliloquies and devout ejaculations. And as we are in continual wants and necessities of both spiritual and temporal blessings, and continually too upon the receiving hand, so our devotions likewise in proportion should have no intermission, but should be continued in prayer and supplication

plication with thanksgiving to the end of our days. And so I come to

III. The third and last consideration, in which I must be very short, (or in the whole I shall be much too long) *viz.* to take an account of the success of this method; how far prayer and supplication with thanksgiving may prove sufficient to produce the happy effects implied in the Text, without so much of our own solicitous cares. And this task will soon be dispatched, because we have but one single evidence to examine in the case: all objections from wicked uncharitable men, from hypocrites and formalists, from ungrateful wretches, from murmurers and unbelievers, against the prevalence of prayer, must be utterly rejected; because they can by no means be competent witnesses as to matter of fact, and in a negative too; that is, that God hath not actually receiv'd and granted their petitions; when they have been utter strangers to all the requisites and proceedings of prayer, have never qualified themselves, nor sought it of God, for the discharge of this duty.

He alone then that can bear witness in this matter, must be a very good and a very holy man, that hath prayed, and at the same time put forth his utmost endeavours both natural and moral towards the obtaining his petitions: That hath believed and put his full trust and assistance in God, to whom he hath addressed himself, and with equal submission and resignation hath been ready to receive good or evil from his hands,

hands, with persuation that by the ordering of his providence they may both prove blessings; That hath banished all malice and uncharitableness from his heart, that so he may come boldly to the throne of grace for mercy and pardon, where he already hath laid in a fund and interest by his own acts of giving and forgiving: That hath likewise endeavour'd to cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that so he may have free communication with God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity: That hath not indulged any darling lust to take off his devotion, or suffered any willful sin to lie at his door and keep out his blessing: That hath been as fervent and constant in his thankful returns and grateful acknowledgments upon the receiving of blessings, as he was in his prayers and supplications for them: That hath persisted too with comfort and resolution in the exercise of this duty, and will pray in the faith and name of Christ to the end of his life, tho' he be never gratified with one single benefit that belongs to the world; yet is not the least disheartened: his faith and hope are rather rais'd the higher, and the fairer and surer is the prospect of an infinite reward. For God must bless, and will reward, those that thus live and thus pray: and what is behind in this world shall more abundantly be made up and recompensed in the other, with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.

Now to God that heareth prayer, and to Christ Jesus in whose name we pray, and who

himself maketh intercession for us; and to the holy Spirit who assisteth us in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make known our requests unto God, be ascribed, all honour, praise, might, majesty and dominion, now and for ever more. *Amen.*

SERMON IX.

Of Friendship with God.

JOHN XV. 14.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

THESSE words, with many other indearing expressions of love and friendship on our Lord's side, you have heard already out of the Gospel appointed for this day *: It will be barbarous to make no returns for such infinite kindness, especially when such easy and reasonable ones are only expected, and such as wholly redound to our own advantage.

Now

* St. Barnaby.

Now to be made the friends of God, and Christ Jesus, must at first thought be esteem'd so honourable an alliance, that surely it cannot but excite every mortal that hath a soul, that hath but one spark of his maker's image, to the strictest performance of every condition that may promote or preserve it. For we cannot but acknowledge that God hath an uncontrollable right, and an absolute dominion over us, as also an omnipotent authority to do with us as he pleaseth; and we by nature, and from our first origine, are but his slaves and vassals, and become more so, and his enemies too by sin, but thereby such weak and feeble ones, that we are the most easy as well as just prey of his vengeance and indignation.

Yet for all this, by several covenants and contracts, and all of his own devising, (he hath *reconciled us to himself*, says the Apostle; he was ever first in the overtures of peace and amity, *Ye have not chosen me*, says our Lord in the same Gospel, *but I have chosen you*,) hath he constituted us friends and parties, and put us in a capacity of being sharers with his son in an everlasting kingdom which he hath promised, where the league shall be then inviolable, and we shall be highly qualified for such a noble alliance.

1. The first covenant of friendship we read of, was with *Abraham*, and he was called *the friend of God*, says St. *James*, chap. ii. And well did he deserve that title! a friend to the most high. And none but God himself out-did

him in the most transcendent act of friendship; for *Abraham* was ready to strike the league of friendship by the sacrifice of his only Son, for the sake and at the command of God; which God himself actually perform'd for the sake of the whole world. Upon which,

2. A second league of friendship God hath established with all men, who being faithful have in this new covenant, the title of *the Children of Abraham*: But then their faith must have all the qualifications of *Abraham's* faith; an operating faith, such as will demonstrate itself in all obedience to his laws. For so the same Apostle in the same chap. v. 21, — 24. explains himself, and therein the dubious sense of *St. Paul* too, and unites the faith of *Abraham* with his works or acts of righteousness: *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered his son Isaac upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect: And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God: Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* God well knew that he would have offered up his son, and so his faith is applauded, because it implied the act; and his other works of righteousness he also well knew, and therefore was he justified, and called the *friend* of God. And whatsoever can be said of faith alone, friendship can never be reduced to such a theory; it can by no means dispense with the real and sensible

sensible acts and returns of love and amity : Amongst men it passes into pretence and flattery, and is soon found out, unless it be abetted with substantial tokens of kindness and good-will. Our Lord must have the product ; he will in no wise dispense with it ; *I have ordained you* (says he further, ver. 16. in the chapter of my Text) *that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain,*

Therefore the article of obedience is indispensably annexed to the league of friendship. We may in some sense be said to believe, that is, hold up the profession of our religion, whilst our obedience is at large, and our lives not so strictly conformable : but we can in no wise be said to be the friends of Christ Jesus, till we closely come up to all his commandments. It was a noble observation of an Heathen, That whosoever would establish a lasting friendship with any man, must lay the foundation on both sides in virtue, because there is nothing in the world besides, solid and substantial enough to bear up the trust and confidence and amicable familiarity which friendship requires between man and man. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

Whatever are the conditions, this is the most inviting appellation : Christ would fain have us come in, upon some relation or other. If we have not diligence or courage enough to fall into his retinue as servants or soldiers ; to serve under so good a master, who will be every day rewarding us ; or fight under the captain of our
salvation

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salvation, who will always be assuredly victorious; let us come in as Friends, and we shall find his kind embraces: And when we are once engaged in this friendship, it will so endear him to us, that his commands will not be grievous. The austerity and reservedness of a master will be laid aside; so you have heard in the verse following the Text: *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth; but I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of my father, I have made known unto you.* All the benefit of this friendship is entirely intended for our use: and we are only to do whatsoever not a common or an erring friend, not a selfish or designing friend, but an all-powerful, an all-wise, and all-merciful friend commands us to do.

We may pretend all homage and vassalage to God, and no less is due; but let us examine ourselves, whether we are so much as his friends; whether we do not live in actual enmity and rebellion against him. And the best way of making the discovery, would be by laying down all the offices of friendship: but as our friendship to God cannot be considered as that which is mutual between equals of the same temper, condition, and other agreeable qualifications, and also wants one of another; so these must be restrain'd to such instances as so great a God will vouchsafe to receive from us; which cannot amount to any emolument or profit, any additional happiness to the bettering of his estate or condition which is already infinite; as may be perform'd between
friends

friends that can mutually help one another. Therefore tho' the Measures of our friendship must be the largest we can make, yet must they be such as are suitable to his nature and essence, and such as in great condescension he hath declared that he will receive from us as tokens of our love, and will take for kindness.

1. Then, Our friend being infinitely great and glorious, the highest honour without reserves must be paid to him. No act is so sound a token of friendship, as to be most tender of the esteem and credit of our friend. And here the office of friendship usually transcends that of common love and charity. For the measure of loving our neighbours is only as we love ourselves; but here the case is otherwise, and honour runs higher than love. Tho' we are modestly sparing in our own vindication, and more wisely let our own credit stand upon its own bottom; yet the common zeal of friendship prompts us to a more vigorous and actual defence of our friend's reputation: and when it is a virtue to be patient ourselves against revilings of others, it is the clean contrary, to suffer our friend to be debased and run down by vile detraction, and all the while look on, and neither act nor speak in his defence.

Therefore to have the strictest and most constant regard to the honour of God, must be the necessary consequent of our profession of friendship: we must make it the end of all our actions and the termination of all our zeal; and as it is so, when others blaspheme the name of God, or any way dishonour him, by the rules of friendship,
our

our zeal and concern will be stirring in all manner of seasonable reproof and opposition: for in truth we keep up a certain *fellowship* with the works of darkness, if we do not reprove them, and we are on the enemy's side, and no friends of heaven, if we do not set ourselves in all legal oppositions against all acts and designs that bring dishonour to the name of God.

David, throughout the whole course of his praises, doth not only exert himself in the highest expressions of honour and thanksgiving to God, but ever and anon shews a passionate concern, that men blaspheme his name, that they set their mouths against the heavens, and have his honour in derision. In a word, if one great end of our friendship towards him, which is our religion, be the honour of God, we must endeavour to prevent its violation in others, as well as in ourselves. And this makes the duty of reproofing sinners, that is, enemies of God, to be indispensably incumbent upon all men, so it be seasonably and prudentially done, and without the danger of provoking them to a farther violation.

Thus our league of friendship must not only be defensive, but offensive too; and all the enemies of God and our holy religion are to be deemed the enemies of every good and generous Christian, tho' all malice and revenge is forbid us towards them. And as we must by the rules of friendship vindicate his honour from the violations of others, so must we preserve it entire to himself; we must not therefore share that honour that is due to him alone amongst others: the
greatest

greatest that we can pay him is not so considerable as that we should make a dividend of it, and join Saints and Angels as sharers with him in so poor a pension. Some say the heights of friendship among men cannot pass between more than two; surely then we must worship and honour God, so as that we must worship and honour nothing like him: we need not the distinctions of *Δεξιὰ* and *Λατρεία*: what honour and worship is proper for him, and he will accept of, must entirely be paid; and surely it cannot be too much, that we need dilate it: besides, our God is a jealous God; let us make bold to attribute that passion of jealousy to him, because it is an indication of both love and friendship; the honour is lost that we pay to him, if we pay the same or like to another.

Now the honour that is due to God is personal or relative: To his person, that is, his Deity, his infinite excellency calls for the highest and most entire adoration, and his munificence to mankind for the quickest returns of gratitude and humility: And we must not bar a reverence to all that is sacred, that is, bears a more particular relation to him; for by the common practice of friendship we ever shew a particular regard to all things, especially those that nearest relate to our friends. It doth not belong to my subject to reckon up to you all things that are thus relatively sacred, whether person or place or time; I will only instance in what is transcendently so, and that is, his holy word: He himself is invisible and incom-

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comprehensible, and the proper acts of friendship cannot be fastened upon him: But his word is the representation of him upon earth, so that to this sense too, as well as to the divine *Logos*, we may apply the words of St. *John*. *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God*: Thence we have the testimonies of his power and goodness, the notices of his will and pleasure, the promises of a reward, and the threatenings of punishment, and the means and methods of obtaining the one and escaping the other. This is the great oracle; and in honour to him, to this we must adhere with the most ardent zeal of friendship, (as we may call it) as tho' his most sacred Person was violated and mangled, when any of the sound and sacred articles of our faith are either maimed or impaired, or overrun with forgeries or human inventions. A sovereign is feared by his laws, and honoured by obedience to them, and represented in his courts of judicature, and we know not how to fix our honour upon God whilst we are upon the earth, but by living up to those laws, that sacred word and religion (and admitting no other,) which he, as the most transcendent instance of love and friendship to the world, hath revealed, who hath brought life and immortality to light. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

2. By the laws of friendship we cannot but be zealous and desirous of all sort of communion with our friend, ever pleased and never fatiated with his company; for friendship is a bond

bond of society that binds faster and closer than even charity it self: Charity obliges us to love all men, even our enemies, but not to associate ourselves with all men, as not with wicked men, such as are of evil and irreclaimable dispositions and practices, such as are revilers, or such as are false and not to be trusted. Friendship must be allowed to make its choice of company; and therefore, if we pretend to be the friends of heaven, according to the expression of the Apostle, *our conversation must be in heaven*. Can any one be said to be the friend of God and Christ Jesus, that doth not love frequently to enter into his closet, and communicate with them in prayer and meditation? that doth not love the publick assemblies, where the Divine especial presence is, and will not suffer any business, any trivial project of diversion and enjoyment to put him by an heavenly assignation, the appointed times of his devotion and conversation with God? that doth not eagerly embrace his ordinances, the holy sacrament, hearing of his word, all opportunities and mediums by which he is like to exhibit himself, or convey his grace and holy spirit? This every one must necessarily grant to be the greatest absurdity, to hate or avoid the society, and profess the love of our friend.

3. We are obliged upon the account of friendship, to decline all communication with the enemies of God: For tho' this is no common or indeed reasonable obligation of friendship amongst men, to hate the enemies of our friend, *inimicus amici, inimicus meus non est*; yet in this case

case it cannot be avoided; for they are more properly and directly our enemies, and it is our interest most, to be at a continual variance with them; I mean the *flesh, the world, and the devil*: It is but a mode of speaking, when we call them his enemies; for they are his creatures, and deserve not the name of enemies in respect of him, against whom they can do no real mischief: But here lies the kindness and friendship of it; they are accounted his enemies, because they are ours. *The friendship of the World*, saith St. James, * *is enmity with God*: Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God. We strike up with another interest and forsake God, unless we fall out with the world, at least use it in all subserviencies to the purposes of our religion.

Christ will admit of no superiours; nay, no competitors in friendship: He that loveth father or mother better than Christ, is not worthy of him; nay, *Luke, xiv. 26. If any man come to me and hate not father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my Disciple. There is a friend*, says Solomon, *nearer than a brother*: Christ, if any, hath the justest claim to this preference of friendship. If we must thus deal with our best friends and dearest relatives upon earth, and lay them aside when they stand in competition with Christ; nay, our own beloved flesh we must mortify and keep in subjection, that it rise not in enmity against God and against our own souls: What a height of treachery must it be,

and

* James, iv. 4.

and breach of covenants, to keep correspondence with his and indeed our own open and avowed enemies? to suffer the interest of the world to sway us more than our religion, our own carnal lusts, and satisfactions, and prejudices, more than the common cause of God? His friends as well as his servants we are, to whom we obey: All friendship is tender; and the friendship of God, is all-discerning too, and cannot be imposed upon; we can impart no secret favours to his enemies, but he finds us out, and every willful sin is declared enmity against him.

4. Another inseparable office of our friendship to God is, that we love one another: Hatred and enmity to our brethren must be to him, whose off-spring we all are, who made of one blood all nations of men. Should a father observe one of his children continually baiting at, and reproaching the rest, it would soon and reasonably lessen his kindness towards him, and he must of necessity take the matter into his hands, and end the quarrel by some seasonable severity upon that son.

And what reason hast thou (O man of nice resentment and quick revenge) to think thyself better than another, or superiour to him in the sight of God, that thou callest him so magisterially to account upon every petty affront, or but suspected injury? he that thou hatest, and wouldst trample upon, is one for whom Christ died; and may be as much in his favour as thyself: and then be sure he will have the better of thee; because it is the rule of his justice and his

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usual proceeding to take part with the injur'd person who is bore down by another's malice; nay, tho' he were first in the provocation: for tho' he hath displeased God by offending thee, yet thou hast done it much more, and quite lost thy cause, and forfeited all defence and protection from heaven, by taking vengeance to thy self which belongeth wholly to God.

The text tells us, *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you:* And the gospel appointed for this Day begins; *This is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you,* so before chap. xiii. ver. 34. *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another,* no new commandment to love one another; but to *love as Christ Jesus hath loved us;* to come up to such a height of friendship was wholly new, never taught or practised in the world before: The law of him that first put it in practice, according to the verse immediately before the text: *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

And we may observe, that this beloved and loving Disciple and Evangelist St. *John*, hath been more especially faithful in keeping the records of this new law; in grateful return for the love that he in particular received from his gracious master: He never in his writings omitted these injunctions; delighted himself on the subject of love. In his Epistles we have it over and over again (1 Ep. iii. 11.) *This is the*
message

message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and (ch. iv. ver. ult.) *This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.* Nay, the verse before, according to his notion, and it is a very rational and conclusive one, we can no way make proof of our love to God, unless we love one another: *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* Our love is not so fine and sublime as to be carried at first sight to an invisible incomprehensible being; grosser objects are more adequate: So that if we cannot love our fellow creatures that are his image, and between whom and us personal conversation and sensible tokens of amity and friendship may pass, it is unlike we should love God whom we never saw with our eyes, nor could ever comprehend with our understandings. In truth he wants not our love, he is above it; he will be satisfied and take it as to himself, if we dispose of it upon the earth.

Thus you see there is no making in with God, but by man; a matchless instance of friendship as well as condescension. Do you love him? he disowns it, he can never accept your love, or acknowledge it true and sincere, unless you love one another. How transcendent then is the love of God to the whole race of Mankind? Their love and charity must begin at home, they must love one another first.

Upon this obligation of loving one another,

is founded that court of equity, of receiving forgiveness from the hands of God, upon that indispensable condition of forgiving one another: And that servant in the gospel, every one will own, did little deserve the favour and friendship of his Lord, who having a very vast debt (and all ours are so to God) remitted to him, cast his fellow servant into bonds for one that was very inconsiderable.

Upon all opportunities too we must shew visible effects of this our love and friendship one to another, which will be taken too as done unto God, that is, in charity and alms-giving to the poor, who are the particular friends of God; if we design any grateful acknowledgements to him, leave it with them; he hath delegated them to receive our gratuities, and he will stand accountable for them: *In as much as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* And this our Saviour calls, *making to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*; getting an interest in heaven by making the poor on our side upon earth.

5. Lastly, a full and intire submission to the will and pleasure of God in all his appointments to us here below, must be a necessary consequent of our profession of friendship; especially upon that perswasion, that he is infinitely wise and cannot err or mistake, and infinitely our gracious and merciful friend, and will do the best for us. We usually leave it to a friend, whose wisdom and goodness we may confide in, to do whatsoever he sees good and convenient for

for us : and will we repine at and murmur against God, who can do what he will, and is still just ; and can dispose of his creatures as he pleases, without taking us into the consult ? We are insufficient as well as prejudic'd judges in our own matters, utterly unfit to be of his council, when he is to order our own affairs.

Now this certainly is as great a truth, as any we can observe of divine providence, that God is so equal in all his dispensations, that he puts every man at least some one time or other of his life in the condition that is most proper and convenient for him, if he can hold it, and doth not let slip his opportunity ; but especially such a one as is fuitable to that which ought to be his main design of living here, which is the salvation of his soul hereafter. And no man by him is placed in such unhappy and hinderly circumstances (and therefore he is an equal friend to all as to the main point) as to be incapacitated to compass that great end, or necessarily condemned to eternal misery.

If he then gives thee neither *poverty* nor *riches*, but assigns thee a middle estate, lest being poor thou should'st be injurious, or rich, should'st become forgetful and haughty ; and what is more, he knows before-hand thou would'st be so : Is he not thy friend ? If he gives thee riches in abundance, that thou may'st be charitable, and have opportunity and wherewithal to do great and glorious acts of mercy and munificence : Is he not thy friend ? If down-right poverty, lest thou should'st be proud, lavish and lustful ; to

keep thee low and wanting, and so diligent to follow thy employment, by which temptation is escaped and sin is prevented: Is he not thy friend? If afflictions, to keep thee in continual remembrance; for prosperity will never hold thee within bounds; and in more kindness still, that thou mayst suffer for thy sins here, and not hereafter: Is he not thy friend? Nay, should he design thee out for the highest achievements in sufferings, persecution for the sake of Christ and his religion: Is he not thy especial friend? It is a just and glorious cause, and the highest honour to be engaged in it; and it cannot but look like the greatest friendship and peculiar favour, that he will put thee in the chiefest post, that he will give thee double honour, and is desirous and hasty to settle it upon thee.

Sufferers of old were God's nearest friends: Of *Job* he pronounced himself, that he was *a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil, and that there was none like him in all the earth*; and yet he must suffer, as tho' all this pre-eminence of virtue and piety entitled him to a greater portion of afflictions, and to the dignity of being put upon the severest trial.

The whole christian world must own that the primitive christians were the best saints, and the choicest friends and favourites of heaven, yet it is well known, by God's allotment, they had the hardest usages from the world; and the hottest and longest persecutions fell in their days.

In respect to all the several conditions we have named, God must be allowed to be the only judge:

judge : And man is no more able to judge for himself, than he is for another ; so much a stranger is he to himself and to his own true interest. But God judges of tempers, inclinations, all natural and acquired abilities, and foresees all concomitant accidents and circumstances: And a man thinks that he sees the worst of his own condition, and doth not like it, but knows not what will be the mischief of one that may prove worse, tho' seemingly better, even such a one he is daily wishing for. It voids all friendship, to tie up a friend to such hard laws, as, in kindness and to gratify him, will do mischief to his friend, because he desires it. And if God should please every appetite, and gratify every ambitious and avaricious desire, he could be no more a friend, than a foolish fond father who gives a child that which will poison him or cut his throat, because he hankers after it. And as it can be thus no friendship in God, as well as no wisdom to humour every man, so none in us to except it ; but cancels all the engagements that we can make, in not submitting to his will, whom we have granted to be most wise and most our friend.

These are the main, tho' not all the offices of friendship we are capable of shewing in relation to God, a party in the covenant of friendship, but infinitely superior to us.

I might enlarge further in the testimonies we ought to give by our love and fear of him : But when I name Friendship, that includes them both (as the greater does the lesser) in the highest

perfection, and is it self more and higher still: As we may distinguish among our selves; our charity must extend to all mankind, and we must love, and pray for all men; and yet by way of preference we shew particular tokens of amity to, and make particular prayers for our especial friends, for princes and parents, for patriots and patrons, and those that have been beneficial to us: So in respect to our Almighty friend; his greatness and excellency call for our love and admiration, and we cannot with-hold it, nature will make us to love so glorious a being; but friendship raises us to higher strains, and gives us wings and activity to perform every thing that will please him, and omit nothing that will ingratiate ourselves with him. So likewise of fear; tyrants and oppressors and all sorts of enemies extort it from us without any concomitance of love: But friendship is that perfect love which casteth out fear, *i. e.* hath no use of it; we are past the rudiments of fear, when we become the friends of God: And all the offices of love, and returns of our duty and service pass into nature and habit and become irresistible; our fear becomes our pleasure, and it is with delight that we dread to offend him, because we are such entire lovers and friends.

If I should enlarge farther, I must take in every duty and every act of religion, to bear testimony of this friendship: *For ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* But a true friend will of himself easily find out every thing that will be acceptable and give content. I will only add two requisite qualifications, to be
 joined

joined to these our offices and testimonies of friendship.

1. That our obedience to God must be entire and impartial with respect to *all* his commandments; for you know nothing turns a friend into an enemy sooner, than when, after we have done him some kind and friendly offices, we leave off, and desert him in some particular exigency. The young man in the gospel came up fairly to our Saviour, till it came to the parting with his estate, and then he fell off quite; and we had better never engage in this league of friendship, if we shall stand off upon any one article; even tho' it be either or both of those (of the highest and soundest loyalty) of being made beggars or dying for the cause: For christian religion is a cause that will bear it, and hath the highest honours and advancement for those, that have lost all, but their courage and their friendship, in the engagement.

2. Our obedience must be sound and substantial: A trifling and an officious friendship to heaven, too manifest in the devotions of some people, looks so like the compliments of the age, the impertinent professions of love and service, that it must necessarily be nauseous in the sight of God. Ceremony did ever render friendship to be suspected; but when religion is all or mostly made up of ceremony, surely then no such mockery or vanity under the sun: We cannot be without some, for order and for helps to devotion (*i. e.* because of our infirmities); but let us not think they will pass in payment for the
sub-

substance; that will prove us but cheats and hypocrites, and God be sure will find us out. Christianity is a laborious religion, nay, (and as we may say) may prove a very expensive one; for as we must exercise all the hard severities upon our own flesh, our lusts, and with utmost pains and labour keep them under, or else we cannot be qualified to be the friends and associates of Christ Jesus; so our lives and estates, and all that is dear to us, must be made a pledge and a sacrifice upon occasion, and all to give testimony of our invincible friendship: And all this (it is in truth) but self-interest to do, when we have an All-sufficient friend that will make us infinite amends and satisfaction.

Having thus laid before you the testimonies we ought to give of our own friendship, I have nothing more to do, but to recount out of an infinity some of those that God hath given of his, and leave them upon your remembrance: Surely it is impossible for human nature that reasons, considers and reflects, to be ungrateful.

In short then (for it is in vain to attempt innumerable instances) God, as to his part, hath not only perform'd the greatest but not omitted the most minute offices that can belong to friendship; and not in ceremony or superficial appearance, but altogether in reality and substance. He is not like a friend to our face, but kind when we are not aware of it, doing better than we can project, or even ask for ourselves: watches over us when we are asleep, and when disabled; keeps close to us when forsaken or dis-

disown'd by our worldly friends: guards and protects us from infinite dangers, which sometimes we do not foresee, but of ourselves are never able to prevent: defends us from the injuries of wicked and malicious men, and is on our part when over-power'd, and when we are on the weaker side; preserves us from innumerable evils and unhappy casualties which our own imprudence and rashness often cast us upon; and keeps whole the slender thread of our lives, which nature of itself could never so long secure. He is faithful in all his promises, gracious in his forbearance and long-suffering, as tho' waiting our own time: he is generous in all his favours and dispensations, and most liberal as well as rich in his mercies, which may excite us to seek his friendship, *for the rich hath many friends*, says Solomon (*Prov. xiv 20*). He is most fair too in all the offices of friendship, and gives no real occasion to his numerous friends to envy one another, and be at strife about his favours; for he is just and equal to all, and where he gives not riches and plenty, he is ready to make up the deficiencies by as good and comfortable a portion of contentment, or give an advance by the helps and advantage of religion. And tho' it hath been said, (as some will have it) that the heights of friendship can pass but between two amongst men; yet surely God may be allowed to be a sufficient friend to an infinite number, and doth out of the inexhaustible treasures of his goodness so dilate his friendship to the whole world, that every man hath a large share,

share, even full measure pressed down and running over.

Nay, farther yet, what hath he not done? he hath made the whole world for our service, all the creatures to be our slaves, to live and dye for our pleasure and enjoyment; the whole creation for our sakes, all the glorious celestial bodies for our use and delight, at least he hath so fitted them for us, and we have as yet discovered no other ends.

And after all, in the fullness of time, as tho' he had perceived the friendship on our side decaying and sinking, he sent his Son into the flesh to renew and revive it; that by his conversation amongst us he may get farther into our favour and kind acceptance, and by taking upon him our infirmities, and being acquainted with our sorrows even in a sensible manner, may like a friend in time of need come upon all occasions into our relief and succour; and also well knowing our weaknesses and the powers of our inclinations and lusts, may plead allowances for our failures and lapses, and so obtain the pardon of our sins, and the healing of all our diseases. And to that end he died for us, to pay all our debts, and at the expence of his own life, both the highest acts of friendship; and so make satisfaction to the offended justice of God for our sins; that the sanction of this friendship may be established and sealed with his blood, and so made inviolable and eternal: *And greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend, as you have*
heard

heard the words in the Gospel immediately preceding the Text ; nay, indeed for his enemies ; he dy'd to make them his friends. And then that he may not go off from us in an imperious and arbitrary manner without, sufficient notices of his will and pleasure, and what he would have us to do ; he hath left us oracles to advise with ; his Gospel, a plain and easy and delightful law, the word of truth and life, by which we have a daily converse and communication with him, as you have heard from him in the Gospel for the day, after the words of the Text : *Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth, but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.* And because he must *leave the world* and *go to the Father* ; he would not leave us alone, but like the kindest of friends, sent us a comforter and assistant to be with us to the end of the world, his holy spirit ; as 'twere to keep up his interest with us, and to mind us of heavenly things and of our good friend that is in heaven ; as also to support us under all our difficulties, to give us a right judgment in all things, to enable us to keep his commandments, and to resist temptation ; whilst he himself is solliciting and pleading for us with his Father, and establishing our interest in the court of heaven, and settling such an advantageous correspondence for us, that *whatsoever we shall ask of his Father in his name he may give it us* ; as we are assured in the last words of the Gospel that hath been read to us :
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These we must acknowledge to be all the truest and sublimest demonstrations of friendship that could ever be made.

Lastly, To conclude, That this friendship may never cease or be interrupted, but preserv'd inviolable to all eternity; he hath rescued us from that destruction our old enmity to him hath made us liable to, and will instate us in immortal bliss and glory: A felicity that we cannot give a fuller (tho' so short) description of, than by calling it the most blessed estate, the high and rapturous enjoyment of everlasting friendship to be attained to upon that most placid and obliging condition; if we are here *his friends*, and do *whatsoever he commands us*.

Which God of his infinite mercy, with the assistance of his holy Spirits, enable us, &c.
Amen.

N. B. *There was a Copy of this Sermon given at her Request to the Lady Coventry, 1701.*



SERMON X.

Of the Being, Enmity, Fierceness, and
Cunning of the Devil, and of our re-
sisting him.

I PETER V. 8.

*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversa-
ry the Devil, as a roaring lyon, walketh
about, seeking whom he may devour.*

SO active and furious an enemy is this
prince of the air, that nothing shall tempt
him to be partial, no composition shall bring
him to a cessation of arms: no overtures of peace
or reconciliation can abate his malice or remit
its prosecution: he either never enters into
league, or will never be bound by one: so that
we have an adversary whose assaults are close
and constant, and whose friendship and alliance
can never be accepted but to our greater ruin.
His fair offers, tho' of *all the kingdoms of the
world* will damn us no less than his batteries, if
not with christian courage resisted; are designed
to

to destroy us. In his pleasing allurements and specious pretences he is as dangerous and as much to be dreaded, as when he appears in the most frightful shapes, or with fury rages and tyrannizes in the bodies of demoniacks. And yet is this implacable devil, the great familiar of mankind; this venomous serpent is twisted about our very vitals, and admitted and cherished in our very bosoms, and made secret to all our designs and purposes; to crush or make abortive those that are good and pious, and to hasten and bring to birth those that are wicked and mischievous.

Neither is he only within us (for his name is *Legion*) but from without also he surrounds us, lays his siege close, lets slip no advantage, neglects not the least opportunity of assault: Besides his two auxiliaries the flesh and the world do always join him; the one within us, and the other without, to drive on his designs. Sometimes he sets upon us with the vehemency of a roaring lion, at other times with the insinuating cunning of another but ravenous beast: His craft as well as violence may seem to be intimated in the Text (as some commentators have been so nice to observe); he is described as a *roaring lion*, whose noise and looks are frightful and killing; he runs not furiously about, as altogether greedy of his prey; (*Psal.* xvii. 12.) but περιπατεῖ, slyly walketh up and down, that he may be the less suspected, and also have time to pry about and cunningly observe his best advantages.

Sometimes therefore he fears not openly and more personally to advance his kingdom among those

those of whom he is most secure; as of old among ignorant idolaters, of late the timorous *Indians*, and now, as into the swine, is translated into the hearts and mouths of his open professed abettors, the bold and bare-fac'd practitioners and defenders of immorality and profaneness. Other times he appears more slyly, like an Angel of light, and would make vice seem so too; lays sins in our way, with reasons to prove them none: and by this means, he gets into company that are thought more creditable, and associates himself with the profound Atheists and some deep politicians of the world; is at the head of every heresy and every apostacy, of every schism, and every rebellion.

He allows you as much religion as you please for the carrying on of his designs, and yet, if you please, you may have none at all. To be seditious and schismatical requires zeal and the pretences of devotion and scripture authority; and he can readily furnish you out with such necessities, being expert at divine quotations.

Some who are easy to be won, he tempts to down-right villany and debauchery, only pointing out the way, and helping out their dull wits and inventions to more exquisite and genteel achievements in vice: Others, who are more cautious and shy of notorious sins (their aim and ends, or their humour and parts lying another way) he draws to offences which seem less, but are equally serving his interest. Open profaneness and thundering oaths easiest go down with some; others of more choice palates, disgust such

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rough sins, but glibly swallow down those more gentle and nourishing ones of lying and deceiving.

And thus do we see the debauchees run headlong into their villanies, whose promptness and facility to wickedness saves their master the trouble of plotting and projecting their damnation: these boast in their sins, and arrogate to themselves bold, and sometimes only pretended enormities: such zealots are the very votaries of Satan, that they do him all the service they can, and when through their weakness, or other unlucky defects they cannot commit, yet desire to be esteem'd guilty of more.

Others we may observe of a quite different humour and practice, yet as dangerously offending in another extreme, and all by the politick management of the same tempter; who abstain from open wickedness, because a shameful or an unprofitable way of living; and so put on religion as a cloak, both to sit loose upon them, and to be thrown off at pleasure; assume the title and quality of Saints upon the same designs and ends Satan doth that of an Angel of Light, under which they may the better deceive, or bring about some specious but most mischievous contrivance. Thus they can fight and preach, reform and rebel, are zealous and malicious, are meek and holy, and yet quarrelsome and seditious, make long prayers, and devour widows houses: and may be (for ought we know) to make them adored and followed by their whining auditors, inspir'd by him, who of old for the same reason breathed
into

into the oracles; for no doubt but his power by permission may as well now extend to that sort of clamorous and unpolish'd oratory, as it did then to those canting rhymes. So that it hath ever been the peculiar business of Satan, to make monsters of his disciples, that they may be the more conformable to his own image. And as *Mahomet*, to make up his *Alchoran*, called in *Sergius* the Christian Monk, and a *Jewish* impostor to the Consult; so our deceiver the devil makes the best composition of a proselyte, out of a Jew, a Mahometan and a Christian professor; whereby he can reconcile religion and immorality, *Jewish* and *Turkish* cruelty with the meekness and charity of the Gospel; and make any sort of evil pass for good upon that irrefragable reason, that good may come on it. In a word, he will help on devotion toward the observance of the first table of the law, upon a prospect that men will think themselves privileged from a nice obligation to the second.

Thus as the bold sinners give the devil but little trouble in bringing about their sin and ruin; so those more choice offenders are by an easy slight tempted by him even to serve God to promote some ambitious or gainful or revengeful design: Such sort of godliness oftentimes best serving some sort of ends, and as often most suitable to the black and melancholick constitutions of some sort of people; and indeed is as agreeable to the policy and principles of this prince of darkness, who is never better pleas'd with the success of his contrivances, than when

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he perverts the ends of religion, and makes the zealous votaries of heaven become his own profelytes and vassals.

Such are the devices of this man of sin, to back our good actions with evil, the observance of one duty with the omission of the next, or else maliciously to interpose in our godly services, and divert them to his own ends. All persons of whatsoever condition are his prey, and all our actions whatsoever are the most powerful means or occasions he makes use of, to carry on his own designs and our ruin: And as it hath been a very ancient, and generally receiv'd opinion, even among Christians too, that every person * hath a good angel or genius to attend and guard him, to direct and incite him in the choice of that which is good and virtuous †; so without too presumptuous a censure we may pronounce, that tho' some have whole legions, yet every one hath his devil, all men are demoniacks, whilst they continue so much besides themselves as to be carried away by the delusions of sin.

So then my text becomes an universal caution, that we be *sober and vigilant, because our adversary*, &c. Which words do visibly consist of these two parts.

FIRST, The word of command, to be in a posture of defence and resistance: *Be sober, be vigilant.*

SECONDLY, The reason and occasion, why we should keep ourselves in so wary a posture; the

* Suus cuique Genius.

† St. Jerom, Psal. xxxiv. 7.

the fierceness and terror of the enemy's approach, and his voracious nature: *Because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion.*

I shall invert the order, and speak first to the latter, being the eminent danger which should awaken and incite us to the former, sobriety and vigilance, the securest posture of defence and resistance: And thence I shall raise these three propositions.

I. That there is a *devil*: (a necessary proposition to be made good in these days, not only against those, that indirectly strike at the very being of a God, by denying that of a devil; but against all irregular livers, who by their conversations do seem wholly insensible of those subtle machinations Satan doth frame against them, because they do not perceive any open assault: and so in effect do little less than question his being, and be sure can then never be provided for resistance.)

II. That he is an inveterate enemy of mankind.

III. For the better proof of these two; That from experience and ordinary observation we may conclude, That there must of necessity be some such enemy, by whose instigation chiefly, and not altogether by the propensity of our own natures we commit most sins. And then I shall conclude the

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whole with the necessary duties of resistance by *sobriety* and *vigilance*.

I. That there is a Devil, was the opinion of the Heathen themselves that ever acknowledg'd a God: But most commonly they were mistaken in the nature of his being, and altogether as to his origine and power. Some thought him co-eternal to God himself, which opinion was afterward the heresy of *Manes*: fearing to refer his beginning to God, who is infinitely good, to his essence they rightly thought it repugnant to be the creator of so great an evil. But to avoid the imputing to God the origine of sin, they did derogate as much from his honour, and quite destroy'd his infinite goodness and power, by raising up an enemy to him from all eternity, and fell into the absurdity of supposing two opposite eternal infinities, which is impossible. The Heathens fell into this opinion, for want of the history of that more rational account we have of his creation and fall from the scriptures; and perhaps the *Manichees* after, because they had denied the authority of the old Testament, maintaining that wild opinion, that the author of the Mosai-cal dispensation was an evil God.

Our relation then had they known or believ'd, would have sav'd them from falling upon these absurdities, of imputing to God the origine of sin, or the creation of so wicked a being, a most virulent enemy both to his honour and to mankind; for God did not make *Lucifer*, nor the rest of his seditious faction, in a wicked estate, but
created

created them in the same perfection with the other Angels that stood: but in their attending upon and praising their creator, he left them to their free-will and choice, being most delighted with such services as proceed from such genuine candor and freedom, and not from force or an impossibility of doing him dishonour. For it is reasonable to think that God is more pleas'd with those that serve him, who have a liberty or fair temptation not to do it, than with those who by the absolute perfection of their nature can do no otherwise.

Lucifer then being highly in favour with God, and falling thereupon into an high conceipt of himself, did endeavour either to dethrone his creator, or make himself equal with him: for want no doubt of an absolute and perfect apprehension of God's omnipotence, which surely if he had had, it is hard to conceive, how he could ever imagine, that any force made against an infinitely powerful being could ever prevail. Therefore God, when he had found no steadfastness in these his servants, and had charged his Angels with folly, spared not this rebellious archangel, nor his wicked associates that had sinned; but cast them down into hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be kept unto damnation. And it is said, that the suppression of this great rebellion was by especial appointment committed to the conduct of our great archangel *St. Michael*, whose signal victory over the dragon and his angels, throwing them out of heaven, you have heard described out of the E-

pistle appointed for this day; and who hath ever since been acknowledg'd the mighty champion of the people and Church of God.

But to proceed in our account of the origine of evil; others there were, who observing an obliquity in most things here below, ascribed the creation of the world to this malignant god, esteeming it as the product of his spleen and ill-nature. This opinion some of the *Gnosticks* are said to retain, which were their tenets before they yielded any submission to the Christian doctrine; and from thence also they might think they had some warrant to keep it up, because the Scriptures so often entitled him the *god* and *prince* of this world.

But neither did they consider aright the works of the creation, which were absolutely good and to be admired as such, and must needs proceed from the infinite goodness of God, and what evil there is, is only the accidental result of man's abusing his free-will: neither did they well consider the works or writings of *Moses* (tho' the *Gnosticks* so zealously joined with the converted *Jews* in defending their law from abrogation); for his account was not only most ancient, but also most rational; that both the world and man were created in a state of perfection, and so consequently were the product of infinite goodness, and not the work of a wicked power: but God justly requiring of man that his obedience should proceed from his free-will and choice, as he did before of the Angels; thro' the instigation of him that fell before, and fairness of the object, he

eats

eats the forbidden fruit, and so forfeits that happiness which his creator had conferred upon him, on the condition he should abstain; and with his posterity deservedly is subject to all those infirmities of a mortal state that were denounced against him in those words, *In the day thou eatest it, thou shalt surely die.* And as for the title, the Devil so frequently hath in the scriptures, of the *god and prince of this world*, it was certainly his due (that is, as to a king *de facto*, or in possession, tho' not *de jure*, according to our modern way of speaking) in those days, when almost all the world paid homage to him.

Many other tenets the ancients held in relation to this wicked being; but in general it is certain most did believe such a one, except some few that were suspected of Atheism, some *Epicureans*, and amongst the Jews the *Sadducees*.

Now as the agreement of all nations in the confession and worship of a God, is a powerful argument to prove the same, so, without diminution to that fundamental article in the parallel, the same agreement in the general notion of this malignant being may be of the like force. And indeed the opinion was not only so far universal, but of greater antiquity than we have yet mentioned. The old *Egyptians* had their wicked *Typhon* as well as their good *Osyris*: *Zoroastres* of the *Bactrians*, and the *Magi* of *Persia* had an *Areimanius*; or god of darkness, to stand in opposition to their good *Oromazes*, or god of light. The *Chaldeans*, who confin'd their notions and their worship to the stars, had their mischievous

chievous planets to thwart the influence of those that were more munificent: The *Grecians* besides their different *Genii*, had their lucky *Jupiter Olympius* and their Ἀποτρόπαιος Ἄδης or *Dis Averruncus*: The *Romans* as they deified their good Emperors under the name of *Divi*, and after implored their benignity; so to their deceased tyrants, did they erect temples, and offer sacrifices, upon the belief that they were *Mali Dæmones*, and had power still to hurt them: To these we may add the *contraria principia* of the philosophers, to which they attribute so many jarring effects.

And truly it seems agreeable to reason, that since there is so much evil in the world, there should be some sovereign patron of it: And tho' it be by God's permission, yet it seems not in any wise consistent with his goodness to be the immediate instrument or inciter: Neither is it reasonable to think, this first and chief promoter of evil, to be raised or created by God for that purpose: But being left to his free will, laps'd into this wicked estate, and 'tis natural to those in such a condition to endeavour the fall of others.

But beyond all possibility of objection, we must conclude the being of such ill-natur'd powers from the worship of those times, which being either lewd or absurd, or barbarous and inhuman, could only be instituted by those wicked imps they ador'd. For had the priests been the contrivers, they would surely more have consulted the honour of their gods, and the taking

of their designs, by excluding a great many of those ridiculous ceremonies, and human sacrifices, and fram'd a religion less to be carp'd at by the wise men of the age, and more grateful to the vulgar. For who could think those gods, who were subject to more folly and vanity than men? Who would adore them that delighted in the blood of their most zealous worshippers? How could such monstrous bestiality be introduced into religious worship, to prostitute virgins and commit the most unnatural acts of lust in their very temples? but by the management of the Devil, who would willingly bring it about that all sense and reason may be inverted; that the highest debauchery may pass for religion, that cruelty and inhumanity may pass for acts of zeal and devotion. *Numa* therefore, when he would reform idolatry, to more politick purposes, wisely abolished human sacrifices, and many other absurdities and cruelties, which had rendered that worship suspected to the people: And *Julian*, long after, was a second reformer, and for greater purity of idolatry on the same design, to make it more creditable and grateful to the world, and disguise its first origine which it had from the Devil, the enemy of mankind.

He then that shall add to the relation the Scriptures gives us of the Devil and his angels, the general opinions of the Heathens of all ages; and shall consider their practice and ways of worship, which could never be prescribed by, or tend to the honour of a good God; together with the power of their magick, the successful events

events of their augury, and many sorts of divination, the prodigious motions and intimations of images, the opposite answers of oracles, the wonderful effects of their *Talismans*; and in a word all the miraculous and amazing feats and performances of *Apollonius Tyanaeus*; most of which the fathers themselves, who were nearest those times, did never question as to matter of fact; and we have as little reason to disbelieve (since most of the authors relate them without any high concern for their gods, or prejudice to any other religion) as any other passages of their Histories; as that there were such and such emperors and philosophers too, that approved and consulted them; that there was a *Celsus*, a *Julian*, that wrote in defence of them. He also that shall consider the impetuous current of wickedness, which hath run down throughout all ages from the beginning of the world, which could never flow from infinite mercy and goodness, hath reasons sufficient to convince him, that there must of necessity be some powerful being which manages this kingdom of darkness; some chief promoter of evil, and subtle contriver of our ruin; That inveterate enemy of mankind, of which I am next to speak.

II. That Satan is our inveterate adversary, with the origine of his malice, and the reasons of God's permission and sufferance.

It is very natural to those that are proud and ambitious, when their designs of rising are thwarted and dashed, but much more when they are

are also degraded from that high and happy estate they once enjoyed, to fall into the deepest extremity of malice and eagerness of revenge, not only towards that power, that opposed and frustrated their ends, but also with an endeavour to hinder all those who are in any possibility of obtaining that felicity and favour which they by their rebellion have lost. And this is the case of the Angels that fell: Their envy and malice both to God and man being the consequence of their first ambition defeated; and falling from so high a station of perfection, they sunk into the lowest degeneracy of nature, which was a restless disposition to display all the remains of their power to the mischief of the universe.

But since their power is still subject to God, and the length of their chains of his appointment; How comes it to pass, that he tolerates so vehement an adversary both to his honour and the works of his hands? Besides his unsearchable will and pleasure, I may presume to offer these two following reasons: The

1. In relation to the lapsed spirits themselves. God determining not to inflict his utmost wrath upon them till the great day of judgment (as appears partly from the testimony of scripture*, being reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day; and partly from the nature of their punishment, which cannot certainly be the extremest, since by permission they vent their rancour and malice upon mankind, and often with success, which must needs be
some

* 2 Peter ii. 4. Jude vi.

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some ease and respite to those that are ready to burst) suffers them to enlarge their kingdom, and bring over to their party those that are as unsteady, and as apt to fall, and so consequently as unworthy of salvation as themselves. Thus did he after deal with *Cain*, passes sentence upon him and condemns him; yet suffers him to live, to build a city, frame a common-wealth, and to be the father of a numerous but rebellious off-spring.

2. In relation to mankind. God purposing to advance those only to his kingdom, whom neither the principalities nor powers of the air could shake, nor any subtile allurements or insinuations of an enemy could draw aside, lets in this *roaring lyon* upon them, not only to destroy and devour those whose idleness and cowardice makes fittest to become his prey; but suffers him also to make the same attempts upon the Saints themselves: That faith being most warrantable which hath passed such a trial; those worthiest to be esteemed the most loyal subjects, who have both suffered for being so, and have had the most winning allurements to be otherwise.

For what notion can we have of obedience, unless it may as possibly tend to another, as to him to whom it is due? or how absurd will it be to expect a triumph in heaven, without an enemy here to conquer? Thus did God deal with his servant *Job*, whom tho' he pronounced with his own mouth *a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil*; yet, that there

there might be a visible and exemplary confirmation of his faith and integrity, he submits him to the discipline and trial of Satan; the only expedient to make good that character; and after his victorious conflict, doubles his blessings upon him.

This may be sufficient to shew, why Satan is our inveterate enemy, the first principle of his malice, and the reasons for the toleration of him: That he is so, may appear partly from his open tyranny of old over mankind, of which I have spoke already: and will more by those more secret machinations, he now most certainly frames against us; of which in the third place I purposed to speak.

III. From experience and ordinary observation, we may conclude, That there must of necessity be some such enemy, by whose instigation chiefly, and not altogether by the propensity of our own natures we commit most sins.

Many there are who upon the Devil's shyness of manifesting himself now a-days to our senses, not only mistrust the truth of those stories of his more personal dominion and visible church before the coming of our Saviour; but also question his very being, referring those relations to the fancies of timorous men, and attributing all those strong incitements we have to sin, wholly to the propensities of our own natures.

Altho' it be answer sufficient, to tell these *Saducees*, that a chief end of Christ's incarnation was to destroy the works of the Devil; giving

giving power to his Disciples to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy : That therefore his kingdom could no longer remain in the same outward grandeur, when a greater and that of God himself was to be established. But their absurdity will more appear, if we suppose him to have had a permission to continue in his temples and oracles, and also a licence to make his visible appearance on any occasion ? whether he would not on his own accord withdraw, and make choice of less discernable ways of opposing christianity.

Surely he had been very impolitick, and had much degenerated from his usual cunning, if he had kept up a publick worship in opposition to that Christ, whom he could not but confess to be the Son of God most high : For indeed it had been a greater confirmation to the Christian religion, and an higher assurance to the professors of it, that there was visibly such an enemy in the world, of whom they were warn'd and taught how to resist, and whose worship compared to that of Christ Jesus, being not only most irrational and barbarous, but evidently to the destruction of mankind, would not a little add to the truth of that religion which opposed it.

Should we make that wild supposition of a temple in a christian country dedicated to his service, where he should be as familiar and terrible in his appearances, and as open in carrying on his worship, as we are told he was not long ago among the *Indians* ; Would not presently

sently all the atheists and miscreants fly to the altars of Christ, for refuge and safety in their profession? And the kingdom of darkness soon be dispatched, and its works by approaching the light easily discovered and reprov'd? But this great politician minds his designs better than so; despises a pompous Church, if underhand he can procure a more numerous one. Tho' among Pagans he can even in person securely domineer, where they never heard of a greater power; yet in Christendom it is far better policy for him to disguise himself, and by less perceptible allurements and insinuations advance his cause. As we see the *Jesuits*, (for no doubt but next to him they best understand the rules of policy) who tho' they sway and are more received in some *Popish* dominions, yet with more gain carry on their trade, by secretly lurking and inveigling up and down *Protestant* countries.

Should Satan therefore frequently appear in some shape, to satisfy these his dear tho' unbelieving Disciples, he would certainly endanger the loss of them: Of all men to *Nero* he was most obliged, yet his curiosity he would by no means gratify.

Pliny * says, he was much addicted to magick arts, and to that purpose got about him all the cunning men he could hear of from the east; but it was ever observed, when the magicians were summon'd in the emperor's presence to perform their feats, Satan always withdrew his assistance,

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* *Pliny*. Nat. Hist. lib. 3: c. 1.

and they became inactive and impotent in what they pretended.: upon which he was confirmed in his atheistical principles, and kept on ridiculing all relations of spirits and infernal powers: Whereas, had the magicians been but successful in their enchantments (as 'tis said they had ever been before) they might have spoiled a good tyrant, unluckily have frightened him into the belief and dread of some other powerful beings, that would certainly vindicate the cause and revenge the blood of the innocent; and so unwarily might have stopt him in the career of his wickedness and cruelties: which would have quite betrayed the politicks of this prince of the air, and have much lessen'd his interest in the world. It would have argued him guilty of what our Saviour told the *Pharisees* was an absurdity to suppose, of dispossessing himself, and setting up a kingdom against his own; and if *Satan be divided against Satan, his kingdom cannot stand*; whilst he might far more vigorously drive on his designs by secretly lurking in the breast of the tyrant. Vice is carried on fast enough by the subtle incitements of an unseen agent, but should some fiend appear to one won by a temptation and just ready for the fact, would he not presently start back, and consider, this must needs be some malicious enemy that designs his ruin.

As faith is the sum of Christ's religion, so infidelity is the fundamental point of Satan's: And as *he that cometh unto God, must believe that he is*; so he that believeth the Devil is not, is in the

the fairest way of coming unto him. In a word, he hates all revelation of God and Christ Jesus, and he will take care to make none of himself.

But, to go on without delaying any longer upon this foolish objection, so often and so easily answered and confuted: Altho' our adversary be so subtle and shy of manifesting himself to our senses, yet by an ordinary view into our conversations we may easily discover his constant zeal and vigour in plotting our ruin; and therefore not only for his strength, but also for his down-right and manifest assaults, is he stiled the *Roaring Lyon*, the *red Dragon*, the *strong Man*, with other names denoting his open hostility.

To be convinced then of the truth of this doctrine must be very advantageous to Christian practice; because it is natural to most men, when they perceive an enemy that delights in their miscarriages, and would rejoyce at their downfal, to be more wary and circumspect in all their actions. And surely were they convinc'd that there is an evil spirit that promotes and aggravates their offences, and laughs at their calamities, they would more endeavour to cross his designs and prevent his triumph; but referring their irregularities to that natural propensity their Creator gave them, they esteem them the more pardonable, and so are less solicitous for amendment. But that the Devil is also a chief agent and instrument, and not so much our own inclinations (which rather qualify and prepare us for his temptations) will appear,

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First, From the nature and quality of most of our sins: And

Secondly, From our general averfeness to religion, or some strange and otherwise unaccountable miscarriages in its duties.

First, If we consider the nature and quality of most sins, how unanswerable to that earnestness with which men commit them; we shall find that the incitement proceeds, not so much from their own inclinations, or the fairness of the objects, as the secret subtile suggestions of Satan.

The *Drunkard* shall often confess and acknowledge, the harsh attendants and consequents of his own intemperance, and charge himself with doing violence to his nature and appetites: That he enjoys little, or but a little while, and suffers much and long: That his company when in that condition, is most troublesome and unwelcome to all his friends and acquaintance who are sober, and when himself happens to be so, nothing more hateful and monstrous than the sight of one in the same bestial condition: That he is constantly indisposed upon it, his health and constitution impaired and broken, and his body perhaps for ever after ruined.

These and other inconveniencies, nay, even repugnances to our common principles of self-credit and self-preservation, that never fail to attend such intemperance, are so great and grievous, that flesh and blood could never dispense with it; that were it a virtue, it would be so harsh, that men would sooner be drawn to pen-

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nance than embrace it. Surely Satan must be one of the club, and promotes the vice, that owes such sinners a shame, and pays them home in the severest punishments. And to instance farther in that most vile impertinent sin of *Swearing*: What lust or passion is stop'd or satisfied by it? What sense or faculty is gratified? It cannot be any zeal to truth that prompts men to such profaneness; for in common discourse it is usually thunder'd out in some frivolous matters that are neither positive nor negative, and so consequently needs not any such eager asseveration. It is seldom required or extorted by the company, who scarce ever desire to be satisfied in any case, by such boisterous confirmations. There can surely be no glory in it, for it renders credit suspicious, and is a constant sign of emptiness and vanity. Neither doth it add any decorum to speech; for, besides its being either superfluous, or commonly made use of to make up an abrupt period, or broken sentences, it is unacceptable and odious to most that hear it, and reprov'd often by those, that perhaps in other things are equally guilty, but have better sense and understanding: And nature is as far from inclining us to swear, as desiring God to *damn us*.

Certainly then this must be the voice of Satan, that with such fury and rage speaks out of the swearer, as he did of old out of the *Demoniacs*. Profaneness and blasphemy have ever been reputed the peculiar off-spring of the Devil, because neither the flesh, nor the world, can any way be interested in their production.

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But farther to pursue such accomplished sinners or gallants as they would be thought : What's the reason a man should not only take pains to neglect his duty and be notoriously wicked, but also be as careful to inform the world that he doth and is so ? when he shall vaunt and pride himself in his own demerits, and glory in the omission of that which can only make him wise and happy. How often doth he brave it in his defiance of the holy scriptures, and if he vouchsafes to look into them, how proudly doth he display his parts in subtile remarks and observations ? All companies must be plagued with his nice descants and objections ; sound doctrines and opinions, especially if *Orthodox*, he hates and despises as old, and common, and vulgar ; and would have the world to know that he hath more sense than to believe a mystery. Prayers and sacraments, and all religious devotions, all that is serious and sacred are as much his aversion, and he scorns, that any man should think so meanly of him, as to be carried away by credulity and superstition.

Whence should proceed the lasciviousness of such lewdness, and such profaneness, but from the Devil ? who then hath brought his Disciple to a fair perfection, a consummate improvement in vice, when he shall account it a badge of his honour to be wicked ; when he shall recount his pranks and practices even in villany as his highest praises ; and when too, he shall quit his ease and natural enjoyments to embrace the most reluctant evils ; shall run through the strictest rigours of mortification and penance, to be
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eminently debauch'd; nay, that shall unnecessarily run the maddest venture of eternal damnation, for the vain reputation of a sagacious sceptick and enquirer, who, by reason of his exuberant extensive wit and judgment, cannot keep the common road of an orthodox faith and persuasion.

I might instance in many other sins, as *pride, envy, covetousness*, and even the lusts of the *flesh*, that nature seems more nearly to comply with, and such as are thought more peculiarly to proceed from original corruption; yet Satan still is the chief agent in our fall: for the profit and pleasure, the designs and ends of which, whosoever shall weigh, will find them so light, and so little proportioned to the concomitant dangers and vexations, and the violence and unreasonableness of their pursuit, that our reason and wills could never so greedily tend to our ruin, were there not a greater impulse from an enemy without, who when he perceives us to look towards an evil, stands ready with violence to thrust us head-long upon it.

Neither doth Satan only super-intend our bad actions, but is as evidently a bold intruder upon our best inclinations and performances, as will farther appear

Secondly, From that general and otherwise unaccountable averfeness to religion, and other miscarriages in the duties thereof, which we cannot but charge ourselves withal.

Now if it be natural to men, and consistent with their flesh and blood, earnestly to desire their own good, and much more that which is

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most lasting : If also their reason informs them of a future estate, where virtue shall be exalted, and vice punished; from whence should proceed so stupid a neglect of such future concerns? Or why should they purposely go against the grain of nature and reason to make themselves miserable?

We see most men of common management never cease from their cares and labours, till they are secure of a certain and constant livelihood, as long as they can hope possibly to live; and not only so, but as eager to compass the same right for ever for their posterity: and this is provident nature. Which then of our faculties can sway us, or what innate temper overpower us, that we are so careless in providing for better and more durable things? If it be natural to us earnestly to request and supplicate for those good things we want, and which will make us happy; and to hearken to and observe the rules and means of obtaining them; how can we lay the fault upon our natures, when at our devotion we are so cold and listless, so little concern'd whether our petitions are granted, and our thoughts at that time more than any other, so apt to be diverted another way? When we so little take notice of the frequent invitations and incitements, the easy precepts and means of attaining the utmost happiness? Certainly this cannot be any thing that is born with us: God gave us not such faculties as should make infelicity and misery our more eligible object: nor surely can it be a total infidelity or distrust in God, or of the performance of the duties enjoin'd; for we cannot

cannot but have some suspicion of the truth of religion, and probability and conjecture are sufficient to make us active in the concerns of the world.

There must surely then be some foreign enemy that corresponds with our enemies at home, that takes advantage of the least proclivity, and renders that difficult and unacceptable to us, which nature and reason unprejudic'd would pursue or make choice of; even the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the Children of disobedience. And as Satan doth thus cunningly draw to himself our best performances, so doth he at other times suffer them to be as well and rightly perform'd as we can wish, only we must give him leave to cast in an alloy of one or two mortal sins; by which we are two-fold more the children of hell, than if we were wicked throughout. He catches a man more surely whose conscience he baits with some plausible duties, that it may with less reluctance swallow down some enormous crimes: so that the saint or sinner (for he is both at times) goes on with such full satisfaction and assurance from his godliness, that he never so much as stumbles upon any of his vicious practices to make enquiry.

Partiality in religious obedience was ever accounted Satan's peculiar province: Let the man be devout, so he will but be uncharitable; let him be charitable, so he will but be unchaste or intemperate; let him be sober and abstemious, so he will but oppress and be cruel; let him be just, so he will but be covetous and ambitious; Satan gains more by the vice, than he loses by the virtue: he cares not tho' we carry on a whole course
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of good works, so we will be proud, and trust in their merit; nay, tho' a transcendently great and glorious work, such as is good in every part, and applauded by all good men, so that there may a tumult or breach of peace be rais'd upon it; or if he foresees a consequence that will be advantageous to his own designs and kingdom. And if it be true that he appear'd to *Luther*, (as it seems he himself confesses in his *Book de Mis. privat.* Tom. vii.) to encourage him in his designs against the *Moss*; he might probably do it, not because it was an acceptable sacrifice to God, as the *Papists* would have it; nor perhaps because he could but confess that it was abominable, as he did that Jesus was the Son of God, which the *Lutherans* say; but more likely, that he was really willing so good a work might be violently carried on, out of which he might expect a considerable booty, as it after in a great measure answer'd his designs: For tho' the *Reformation* (even next to that of the Gospel itself) was an act of God's greatest goodness, on good grounds begun and well intended, and justifiably carried on; yet if we consider, besides the many divisions the enemy after sowed among us, those continual bloody wars, that hellish Inquisition, and many cruel *Massacres*, which enhanced the guilt of the *Papists*, and poured out the blood of innumerable zealous Christians; Satan might be the greatest sharer in the sad consequences: besides, if we add to this computation, the advantages he hath made by Atheism, profaneness and sacrilege, the diabolical opinions

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against the Divinity and satisfaction of Christ Jesus, and many other Heresies; perhaps they are as great and as answerable to his designs, as those he formerly made by *Popish* superstition, by all their damnable articles of faith, and the idolatry of the *Mass*: And so the true invisible Church of God, consisting of sound believers, may still be shut up in as narrow a compass and bounds as he could wish. But a greater advantage must he still make of the too eager, absurd, and most ridiculous zeal of the following second Reformers amongst us, who had not the least warrant or authority that could really sanctify their designs: For by this project he brought about first a Rebellion, with all the calamities attending it, and you know that is as the sin of witchcraft, and then you may guess its origine. And secondly a general contempt of religion; for in truth those zealots have made it so nauseous, that some pretenders to nicer reason think themselves more cleanly and manly under the profession of down-right Atheism or infidelity. And there is a third generation of men sprung up, who think it scandalous to be devout and serious; and lest they should be esteem'd *Puritans*, discard all good principles, and disclaim all pretences to a good life; like the stupid bravery and generosity of those *Indians*, that scorn'd and renounced the offer of heaven, because the *Spaniards* were to be there.

But thus doth Satan appear also among the sons of God, and whom he can't tempt to downright sin and actual transgression, he sows his tares amongst

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amongst their good feed, and ensnares them with their good actions.

Since then we have an adversary who on all sides surrounds us, openly assaults us, and secretly undermines us, promotes our vices and corrupts our virtues, assists us when we are wicked, and trapanes when devout : How happy should we be, could we every way guard ourselves ? The expedient is easy, if we have but courage. Tho' he was a great Archangel, yet he is already fallen ; tho' a mighty prince, yet but of the air : Tho' his power be vigorous and subtile, yet if we do but barely resist, all his machinations are crushed and he cowardly flies : God will shut up the mouth of this *roaring lion*, as he did of those *Daniel* was condemn'd to and shut up with ; if we strongly pray and cry out to the Almighty, and fear him alone : We have his promise for it ; *the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them* : We have legions against their legions, with our invincible Archangel St. *Michael* * at the head of them, and right on our side : for the Angels of God are all sent forth to minister *for them who shall be heirs of salvation* : And we this day pray, that by God's appointment they may *succour and defend* us upon earth ; of which we shall not fail, if we qualify ourselves for their assistance ; if we keep ourselves in the habits of sobriety and vigilance ; with which advice of my Text I am in short to conclude.

Lastly,

* Preached on Michaelmas Day.

Lastly, Be sober, and vigilant.

1. Sobriety, of which vigilancy is the most usual, and almost constant effect, is a virtue of so large an extent, that every irregularity argues a want of it, and lays us open to our adversary. It consists in an even, quiet, and constant temper, both of body and mind. Any disturbance or seditious commotions in either, weaken us within, and give advantage to the enemy without. Our Saviour speaks of a certain obstinate devil, that is *cast out* but by *prayer and fasting*; by temperance we make our bodies proof against him, and by prayer exorcise him. As one overcome with wine (for to such the word *νῆαρε* * in the original immediately relates) is the unfittest to manage any business, the easiest to be imposed upon and cheated; no less are we disabled by that or any other intemperance to defend ourselves against his strength, or put by his stratagems. When he finds we have subdued ourselves and got the conquest of our appetites and mastery of ourselves, it is time for him to be gone: When our craving desires cannot be tempted with delicacies, when the fairest objects cannot court us to embrace them, he hath but little hopes of bringing over our wills and affections by less powerful temptations: when all those little complices that drive on his designs within us are maul'd, he presently raises his siege and flies. But if we live in obedience to flesh and blood, humour every petty lust, and are
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* A verbo *νῆαρε*, sobrius sum, cui opponitur *μεθύω*, Ebrius sum; Epigr. lib. 2. Cc.

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swayed by every weak inclination, he presently rushes in upon us, and makes us his vassals.

And therefore surely he was rather out in his policy, when he set upon our Saviour after forty days fasting; for it was unlikely that when he had conquer'd that part of his humanity which is always most forcing, most eager and intent upon its object, he should be taken with every gay and glittering temptation. There is indeed a certain sort of intemperance will flush up some mens valour in quarrels and combats betwixt one another; but will not hold long, and here not at all against such a lasting inveterate enemy, whom we must resist daily, and by the same methods we preserve our natural life, our strength and vigour of body.

Neither are we yet secure, tho' we lay our bodies low, if we give too great a licence to our minds, and indulgence to our passions; this will let in the devil but the backway: he cares not tho' we subdue the lusts of the flesh in some foul instances, so we be but proud and envious: a meagre face and aspect is oft-times as true a sign of malice as of fasting: *he came neither eating nor drinking, and yet hath a devil*, is not always a false conclusion. And because the temper of our bodies hath ever a great influence on our minds, from thence doth Satan begin his assaults, and fits himself to all sorts of constitutions: If he meets with melancholy; there he suggests envy, jealousy and eagerness of revenge, and sometimes an over-heated and erroneous zeal, and then he hath a man fitted for all desperate

sperate and villainous designs, best suiting with this black and dismal constitution: If with a sanguine complexion; there he promotes self-conceit, wantonness, profaneness, inconstancy, with all other actions of vanity and lightness, and commonly an open and impudent profession of irreligion: And then he hath a man too, at all turns, bold and daring in all wicked enterprizes. Nay, tho' he lights on those that think they have gone far in correcting some of the extravagancies of their constitutions, yet he seldom fails of conveying into their hearts those (too often thought) puny failings of malice, ambition and covetousness, old sins that are almost now become virtues, at least venial, and quietly reign even among the self-denying and mortified part of the world, the high places which they are never likely to pull down. We must then purge out this leaven of *Pharisees*, we must mortify our minds, as well as our bodies, lest by being too eager and intent in fortifying ourselves one way, we waste our strength, and give advantage to the enemy of setting upon us more violently where we are weakest: This we must do, and by no means leave the other undone.

The greatest design and indeed happiest effect of christian mortification is to govern our tempers; and herein consisteth the truest and most genuine sobriety. Pride at first, and now malice, are the peculiar sins of the devil, we cannot better encounter both, then by the opposite virtues. St. Jude says (ver. 9.) *Michael the Archangel in a contest with him durst not bring against him a railing*

railing accusation, but said, *the Lord rebuke thee*. Durst not! that is, because he was a good Angel, and durst not return his malice: It is an angelical temper that cannot be ruffled or put into disorder even by the devil himself: However difficult it may be to us to imitate, it is such a sobriety of behaviour in meekness and goodness, that will give us the surest victory over all both our earthly and infernal enemies. Thus far of the preparatives to vigilance.

2. We are also to be *vigilant, because our adversary the Devil, &c.* As vigilancy is an effect of sobriety, so diligence is an usual effect of that: But having not time to enlarge upon all watchful postures of defence, I shall only give one single instance, but very effectual and successful in this case, and that is, Diligence in our lawful and proper employments, or keeping our selves to honest business. Experience tells us how ready idleness makes us for all the insinuations and cheating impositions of Satan; whereas his suggestions are rejected as idle and impertinent, when we have something else to do. It is his business indeed to tempt, but the idle person usurps his office and tempts the devil.

Non licet, says an eminent prelate * and preacher of our church; *It is not lawful*, is a very proper and direct answer, when the devil would tempt us to sin: but he is a Sophister, and will probably wrangle us out of that hold: But *non vacat*, is a stronger and surer answer. I am busy, and I cannot do it: he hath time and opportunity

* Bishop Sanderfon Serm. ad Pop. 1. Cor. vii. 34.

portunity, when we are out of business, to partly with us, and then he soon confutes us into sin; but to let him know that we have something else to do, is to give him the greatest baffle and repulse: he hath no where to fasten his engines upon, and his temptations will no more hang together, or be able to draw us than his rope of sand.

Semper boni aliquid operis facito, ut diabolus te semper inveniat occupatum: Was the advice of St. *Jerom* to his friend: "Be always employ'd and busied in something that is good and honest, that the Devil may never find thee at leisure for his own use *."

This then, is the encounter we are to engage in: to conquer our flesh and blood, suppress the exorbitances of our constitutions, and keep ourselves to constant business.

Thus armed in one hand, and employ'd with the other, like the *Jews* in building the walls of *Jerusalem* under the assaults of the enemies †, together with our heart lifted up to God in prayer, we shall be able to make sufficient fence against this great enemy of our souls.

The rest is done for us by the death and passion of our Saviour, who hath pull'd out the sting of death and sin, and so check'd the power of the adversary, that he cannot commit the least violence on those who shall resist him, stedfast in the faith, as is our Apostle's further advice in the verse following the Text.

This is all the danger and difficulty of that warfare

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* Hieron ad Rusticum, Tom. i. Epist. iv.

† Nehem. iv. 7.

warfare we are put upon, which when we have resolutely finished, then have we fought the good fight, and are prepar'd for that crown of righteousness and victory which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to all those that have attain'd the dominion over sin and Satan; which, after this life ended, God of his infinite mercy bestow upon us, through the merits of the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XI.

*Against Irresolution in the Faith
and Practice of Religion.*

A C T S XXVI. 28.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

IT is truly a very hard and deplorable instance of divine providence, that the far greatest part of the world hath been so long kept off from the Christian religion by infidelity. And yet it is still of a more doleful consideration, that a far greater proportion of those that are within the pale of the church, and

and are professors of the true religion, should for want of resolution and persistence in that which they have engag'd, be utterly deficient, as to all the true effects and purposes of Christianity; and so must necessarily more miserably miscarry at the day of judgment than the former, as having acknowledg'd a full conviction of all the truths of the Gospel, and solemnly engaged to submit to all the prescriptions and injunctions thereof, yet live as contrary to them as the very Heathen, who are no more than a law unto themselves, and who will above them have this reasonable and equitable plea, *viz.* That they never heard any thing of this revealed law or gospel; or by the force of education and other circumstances they could neither help nor avoid, have been invincibly engaged another way.

Our great man in the Text owns himself convinc'd in a great measure, but could not fully resolve upon the point. To be persuaded in the understanding is but a mere complement to the rational preacher, unless the man be brought over in his will and affections. Such another court-convert was he as *Felix* before (*chap. xxiv. ver. 25.*) who fell to *trembling*, upon St. Paul's close reasoning upon those home-subjects of *righteousness, temperance and judgment to come*: And yet we read in the very next verse, he was hankering after a bribe: *He hoped that money should have been given him by Paul, that he might loose him*; where it is said, he *sent for him the oftener and communed with him*; all in court complement, to get by him or to ruin him. But

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in the histories of them both, we hear of nothing but perseverance (without starting) in the former course of their lives; we read nothing of their Christianity but this sudden transitory fright and alarm.

Felix trembled, but was as ill a man still as he was before. And *Agrippa* (if we might believe him) was almost a Christian, but had as good been none at all, as not mend his life: And yet was it honour to *St. Paul's* reasonings, that men so great both in authority and vice, should shew that upon the bench which is most usual and proper for the bar, that is, tokens of fear and remorse; altho' it lasted but a little time: like the penitence too of malefactors, who whilst under the dread of the sentence and the approaching execution, do usually make many grimaces towards reforming or taking up; but if that be escaped, with greater boldness do they return to their former practices.

To apply the matter to ourselves; we have been longer in the church than *Agrippa*, or rather like him upon the borders of it; and scarcely come up even to his pitch, of being almost Christians: for in truth Christianity is so little minded by us, that we do not so much as do it by halves. Tho' our resolutions and promises are often made and repeated, yet our violation or breaking of them is so habitual to us, that they that have never resolv'd at all in this matter are be sure the wiser men, and we may conclude too in a safer condition; deal fairer with God, who hates nothing more than unfaithfulness or breach of promise.

The aggravation is greatest on our side: *Agrippa*,
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an heathen born and bred, professes he was almost come over to the Christian persuasion, but he could not hold it: We are as 'twere overgrown Christians, that is, in our outward profession, and have set our seals over and over again to the obligations, by solemn leagues and covenants, by creeds and sacraments, by resolutions and protestations, by publick and private engagements, and repeated vows and promises, by often confessions, and fair shews of penitence: in a word, by all appearances of being fully satisfied in the truth of our religion, and the necessity of living up to all the laws and precepts of it; and yet it is more than we can prove that we are believers at all, that we are yet in the faith: on the other hand it's demonstrable, that we live contrary to that faith we profess: Or, if in some religious passion, or devout fit of ecstasy, or frightened like faint-hearted *Agrippa*, we think we are fully persuaded, and so are for the present bent upon practice; yet, alas! how soon doth our faith vanish, and our resolutions languish, and all the impressions rais'd by persuasion disappear, and from *almost* we become in effect *not at all* Christians. So that this passage is much our case, and indeed the best of it; it is not always that we are *almost* Christians; we must be severely and closely rubb'd up with arguments and admonitions, and the application continued too, else persuasion and resolution will but slowly rise, and sooner remit and fall back again. From the import therefore of the words, it may be to purpose to enquire into

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I. Our Irresolution, its nature and danger.

II. The vanity, or rather madness, of not resolving, or coming up to the point of all possible security in so great a concern.

III. The motives we have to be more fix'd and resolv'd.

I. Of the nature of our *Irresolution* and its danger.

There are but few of us that cannot but daily experience this infirmity, and oft-times own it; however mean and vain it is for those that pretend to govern themselves by prudence or common reason. It is indeed the grand defect of our religion, there is scarce a sin of omission or commission, but is complicated with this guilt, that is, a violation of our promises and resolutions: And there are but few sinners who have not some time of their lives made solemn engagements that they would take up and be new men, and every Christian duty that is occasionally perform'd is renewing the obligation, and receiving the holy Sacrament is sealing it with an oath: so that Irresolution is the scandalous absurdity, as well as vice of our whole conversations.

Obstinacy may in many things be pleaded for, and be sure in good things it is the greatest forwarder of virtue and holiness, for it is perseverance: and in many evil things too, when we blame and dispraise the action, we are apt to commend the resolution. But irresolution is most
shame-

shameful and scandalous in virtuous and generous acts, and of very little credit in those that are otherwise. It may indeed prove very lucky when a man desists in a wicked design or enterprise for want of resolution: but irresolution was never a virtue itself, nor ever was an indication of virtue or wisdom in any man. In all the designs and purposes of our lives, it is our common failing, but it is to be feared it attends our religion from the beginning to the end. And tho' every day we spend takes one from the number of those we shall have to live, and they lessen apace, yet we are resolv'd no better to day than we were some hundred of days ago: so that perhaps resolutions are every day made a-fresh, yet in truth irresolution is the result of all our resolves. The last fit of devotion; it may be when we were in a melancholick mood; the last time we were at the altar, the last alarm from publick or private judgments, the last advice and admonition from hearing or reading some pious and pathetical discourse, rais'd indeed a great hurry and bustle among the passions for a little while, and look'd toward conversion and an heavenly design.

Oh! what fair promises did we then make? But what hath been produced? This is all but noisy devotion, what is usual, when there is a struggling between the understanding and the will, when the one is convinced, but the other will not yield and obey.

Alas! Here is no more Reformation, than is brought about by seditious tumults and rabbling insurrections of the like nature in the body po-

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litick : A great cry about reforming and mending the government, which is made much worse by their tumultuous zeal. So is it sometimes with us promising Christians ; great clamours against sin, and mighty efforts towards virtue and holiness ; but nothing can be done in a hurry and without steady resolutions : and so our sins go on in full number and measure as before, or rather after that respite in fuller career : And we are no fitter (notwithstanding all this combustion) for heaven, the place of peace and quietness, of temper and serenity, (nay, rather more unfit) than we were seven years, that is, in a law computation, an age ago.

And whilst it is thus with us, we come up no higher than *Agrippa's* religion: The great man was in some rapture, but not high enough for *St. Paul's* heaven: he could take no firm hold, his persuasion was weak and feeble, and so falls down with greater weight. And observation will inform us, that when we have made specious efforts towards holiness, but not strong and home enough ; when we have abounded with pious resolutions, and made many solemn vows and protestations ; when we have been staunch in our ways for a while, and set ourselves in a pharisaical mode to be serious and reserv'd for a time ; and threaten'd mighty things against the enemies of our souls, the flesh, the world and the devil, but are not thoroughly converted, or fully established in our resolutions ; sin and lust will get ground by all these short essays, and we shall fall back with a vengeance,

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A Resolution in religion, as I have intimated already, is a fresh engagement made to God of a better course of life, or more close obedience to his laws; and so every sin besides its own guilt, is a breach of that resolution, and consequently a certain sort of apostacy, when we have so far strain'd ourselves, as to break to pieces. Both *Agrippa* and *Felix* were in a much worse estate, by coming so near upon the borders of conversion, and then flying off without one act of virtue and piety: as any heavy body forced from its centre, the higher it is raised, and then let go, falls back with the greater violence, and oft-times dashes to pieces; so falling back from an height and certain transport of a resolv'd reformation, we make ourselves much more the children of wrath than we were before. For be sure it is the worst estate of a Christian professor, when breaking of pious resolutions becomes a habit. This must cause the first making of them to be, if not a down-right formal sin, yet such a mockery to God and religion, that must necessarily be most provoking in his sight, and is the very way to that desperate estate which we call hardness of heart or a reprobate sense.

He that breaketh his first resolution, commonly doth it with a trembling hand, but upon every repeated violation, the reluctancy doth wonderfully remit and abate, till at last the custom and habit of breaking them, is as 'twere naturaliz'd, and there is no remorse at all, tho' we violate thousands of resolutions and promises made to an Almighty all-knowing God.

But

But is not this the height of impiety, to think to trifle (to say no worse of it) with an all-powerful God, who is of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*, and of more discerning ones than to overlook such prevarication?

I must tell you, to be plain with you, none of you can bear with this sort of knavery and baffling practices from one another. The promises and resolutions are fair, and may betoken something for the present perhaps of an honest meaning and good intention; and so are those of a shuffling paymaster, who promises you from day to day to pay your debt and just demands, and that you shall not lose a farthing by him; but still he delays from day to day; his lusts and pleasures are very chargeable, and he cannot spare his money; so that, if you take no other course, he is like enough to die in your debt. And this is a true account of our base dealing with the Almighty, to whom we owe all and pay nothing; make fair promises, but cannot keep our words: Yet he must and will be paid, there is no remedy for it. Satisfaction indeed is offered for us, out of the infinite fund and treasure of Christ's merits; but that we reject, as appears by these practices. Therefore we must some way or other be responsible ourselves; the whole debt will lye upon us; and 'tis a dismal thing to think of dying with this trespass upon our souls: For the punishment must be eternal (it can be no less) to answer to the infinite justice of God, who is thus injur'd and offended. The proceedings are frequently represented in the Gospel,

Gospel, and they are most equitable ones; to have our portion *among hypocrites and unbelievers*; to be cast into *outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*; to be deliver'd over to the tormentors till we have paid the utmost farthing, and that must prove an everlasting score: This must fall upon us for our trespasses and injuries against an infinite Majesty. *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, is the doleful sentence to be pass'd upon that party (as you read *Mat. xxv.*) that were plausible and fair in their pretences and engagements, but in reality performed nothing, could never keep honest to their words; *and these*, saith our Lord, *shall go into everlasting punishment: But the righteous*, i. e. they that have in this matter kept honest to their word and resolutions, and actually performed them in good works, *into life eternal.*

II. In the second place, we are to consider the vanity and madness of not resolving, and coming fully up to the point of all possible security in so great a concern. Certainly it is the greatest instance of vanity in man, and next to phrensy, that he should upon many occasions keep such a mighty ado about religion, seem so tender of it, (as his dearest property) lest it should be invaded by any he calls the enemies of it; nay, so forward in its defence, as to make use of such means and instruments as are forbidden by its own laws, and are directly contrary to its
very

very frame and constitution, upon pretence of its preservation: And yet not regard what our religion was designed for, the great end of Christianity, which was to make us virtuous and holy here, that we may be happy hereafter. This is a concern that is minded least and last, post-pou'd to all the little affairs of this present life.

Upon common principles of honour and generosity, we can be even punctual to niceness in our words and engagements one toward another, whilst Christianity hath no such tie upon us: We can play fast and loose with our religion as we please, and make so hold with the Almighty and all-merciful Author of it, as well as with our own consciences, as to keep our promises to them only at our leisure or convenience, when consistent with our present profit and pleasure: And so in effect treat them as *Jews* have done *Infidels*, and as *Papists* do *Hereticks*, keep no faith or engagements with them at all.

Besides our base treatment of God himself, our management is monstrously extravagant as to our own interest: For though we call it a promise, an engagement and debt to heaven; yet the performance and payment is entirely our own gain: and so keeping our resolutions made to God, is, in one word, but being honest to ourselves.

No man (we use to say) should be particularly rewarded for his justice in common dealings, for keeping his word, or paying what he hath borrowed or stands engaged for: This is
but

but common honesty, a satisfaction to his own conscience, and gratification to every generous temper: But in this case we have the encouragement of the greatest reward, in being indeed but honest and just to ourselves, and in keeping our resolutions and engagements to God; which in the main amounts to thus much, that we resolve not to damn our own souls; will no longer continue in those vicious courses that will raise his wrath and indignation against us.

Now this being a matter of everlasting concern, all irresolution and delay, must I say be downright madness, and such as we should be horridly ashamed of the least appearance of, in any considerable affair of the world. What! To put off all preparation for eternity to the last Day! and that last day the most uncertain of all appointed times, the least in our power, and no more known to us than the great last day; which, our Saviour says, the *son of man is not to know*, but only the *father* alone. Is any profligate or spendthrift so much besides himself, as we are in this case? he only by living fast dispatches that estate in a short time, which should last him for a longer life: we more nimbly squander away an everlasting inheritance in the short compass of a mortal life, which is but a moment to eternity; labouring with all profuseness to make away with our time, willfully murdering it, whilst the hour is hastening on, that dreadful one of death, when (if our senses are not quite gone before) we would give all that ever we possessed, or the whole world

world, if it were ours, for the respite of a day to make our peace with God, or complete our repentance. It may be enough to distract us to look back upon all the precious time and opportunities that are let go, and we cannot command one to come. And the result of all must be, that leaping into the flames, and hoping not to be scorched, or into the ocean, and hoping not to be drowned, is not more desperate madness.

How vain a thing do we make religion, the best and wisest constitution, by our fickle usage of it? but it is not a jesting matter when so much lies at stake. And tho' we cannot come to a resolution as to practice, yet the matter it seems is decided in our judgments, and we are altogether (or else we every day give ourselves the lie) persuaded of all the truths of the Christian religion: And they are very dreadful truths on the one side, as well as comfortable ones on the other: To believe them firmly and soundly, as we profess, and yet to be so irresolute, as not to be guided and determined by them, would sound like an impossibility and contradiction, did not man, the most inconsistent of all God's creatures, make it out in matter of fact.

Are the promises great and desirable? and will we not yet resolve? Are the penalties and punishments dreadful and everlasting? and will we not yet move a step? Are the invitations pressing and importunate, why will we die? why will ye not come to me that ye might have life? and will we make no advance?

We

We are ready enough to catch at every trifling advantage in this world, and shrink at the appearance and approach of any evil to our bodies or estates, tho' it be but imagination and a doubtful fear, and be sure nothing shall be omitted to obtain the one and escape the other.

But *this eternity* is such a dull business; the salvation and damnation of our souls, such a poor thought; that it will be enough to consider on it, when we have settled our other affairs, and have made our wills, and are taking leave of the world: But do we every day (as we usually say) hope to be sav'd; and yet in truth cannot resolve to be sav'd? For that is the very truth of the matter, we resolve against it, if we will not engage in the ways and means of salvation. And if there be nothing done to-day towards it, in all likelihood as little may be done to-morrow, and that following day may not be ours; for *this night thy soul may be required of thee*; for *behold! Now, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation*: That summons was the case of one that perhaps as little thought of it as any one here: and whose may it not be? However, die we must, and will we not resolve to live in expectation of a necessary and irresistible fate?

Could any one keep it off, or were it uncertain as our own resolutions, a loose and idle person (and indeed none but such) may then have some plea for not resolving to quit his pleasures and vices, and engage in the new practice of a holy and strict conversation in virtue: But I say,
death

death is certain, and that demonstrable from all the daily spectacles of mortality we see with our eyes, and have been known from the beginning of the world: altho' it looks as if we wanted a proof of that certainty. And likewise our business of futurity is of the deepest concern, as we pretend to believe; of everlasting life and everlasting death. But this must argue us perversely bent upon destruction, that we are not yet come to a resolution, we have not yet agreed the matter within ourselves, whether we will accept of everlasting salvation; and pleads for the justice of God, who can inflict no less than eternal and the most exquisite torments, upon those that cannot upon such considerations be fully perswaded to be Christians, that cannot resolve to submit to such easy and very reasonable conditions, for which the reward is an everlasting crown of glory.

When our great Apostle, in that xv. chap. of his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, had both from reason and revelation laid down the certainty and manner of a general resurrection of the dead, he thought no less an obligation could be conclusive upon all that were perswaded of the truth of that astonishing but most comforting and encouraging doctrine, than to be *steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding, in the work of the Lord, for as much as they knew their labour should not be in vain in the Lord.*

III. In the last place, I am to propose what farther motives we have to be resolute, and thorough

thorough converts, and fall forthwith upon our Christian duties.

Agrippa was so far convinced as to own himself almost a Christian, upon no more perswasives than *St. Paul's* telling of the vision he was surprized with, as he was going to *Damascus*, and the great light that shone round about him and his company, and the voice of reprehension, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* which was all but a single miracle, and related by him that was a party; the prisoner was the evidence, and was not so prevalent upon *Festus*, who cry'd out with a loud voice, ver. 24. *Paul, thou art beside thy self, much learning hath made thee mad.* Now we are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses, all the evidences that possibly can be given of the truth of the christian religion, and the indispensable obligation of its laws; and will we not be perswaded?

It would be too tedious now to run over all the topicks of arguing, to prove the truth of our religion; and surely unnecessary to those that are already engaged in its profession, and have given up their names, their full assent to the faith of the Gospel: No one surely that worships here will own but that he is fully convinced and perswaded in his understanding, that he ought altogether to be a Christian: All the difficulty that then remains must be in bringing over our wills and affections in obedience to this perswasion. I must still insist upon it, want of resolution is our great defect.

Whatsoever atchievements have been accomplished

plished since the beginning of the world, have all been brought about by the mighty powers of resolution: All that is great and glorious in council, and conduct, and bravery, is resolution: What is courage and magnanimity, in the men of arms, but resolution? What is wisdom and industry, in the men of business and employment, but resolution? All the inventions of arts and sciences, and their improvements, are owing to it; and nothing gives a better proof of greatness and true manhood, than resolution in all our rational movings and actings. How unhappy is it then that we cannot exercise it in the practice of true religion? all whose acquisitions and achievements as far transcend the forementioned glories of the world, as infinity and eternity doth the transitory actions, and common age of men. And resolution here would certainly be as creditable an indication of wisdom as was ever shewn by man: because the means, the ways, the measures of living accordingly, in order to these glorious ends, are such as are most graceful and honourable, most becoming the dignity of human nature.

What glorious creatures should we be, could we be fully persuaded and brought over to a virtuous course of life? Could we be but stout and resolute against all vice and irreligion? How far should we raise ourselves above common human nature, and border it upon that of Angels, could we but with resolution command ourselves? Could we attain to that divine temper

per and trueſt bravery of patience, meekneſs, and humility, and of being able upon any occaſion to deny and mortify ourſelves? Could we conquer our luſts and paſſions, or keep them under due order and government? it would be as noble an atchievement, as ever man attained to by all the powers of reſolution. *He that is ſlow to anger,* ſays the wiſe man, Prov. xvi. 32. *is better than the mighty: And he that ruleth his ſpirit, than he that taketh a city.*

But here it is we ſtick and ſhame ourſelves more than in any other tranſactions of our lives; we cannot bring ourſelves, tho' we have promiſed ſo fair and ſo often, tho' we are ſo much obliged, and it is vaſtly our intereſt, to ſerve that God fairly and reſolutely, who can ſo eaſily blaſt our ſtouteſt reſolutions in all other undertakings. Oh! then that we could but be *ſteadfaſt and unmoveable* here; that we could but fix ourſelves in this moſt honourable and gainful reſolution of virtue and holineſs; for it would alſo enſure a bleſſing upon all other our reſolute and honeſt engagements.

But alas! poor heartleſs and irreſolute wretches. as we are, the reformation of our lives ſeems a frightful difficult work; the reaſon is, we do not ſo much as attempt it, or make a beginning. You know how much habit and cuſtom prevail in ſin, and particularly have now heard how powerful it is, when we have uſed ourſelves to the breach of promiſes and reſolutions. But if we could change our habits of ſinning, into a habit of holy living, we ſhould find it much

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more easy and delightful, besides all present inward comfort and satisfaction. We only want courage to make an essay and first choice, *elige vitam optimam*, says the philosopher, *consuetudo faciet jucundissimam*. Industry will easily make its way through the most difficult things of the world upon the little incitements of profit and pleasure: Why should religion be such an unpleasant and gainless labour, that we are so loath to come to it? Religion! that is fitted to the meanest capacities, that is made for the poor and lowly in spirit, and is adapted to all states and conditions of men, and at last rewarded with the most durable gain, transcending all mortal enjoyments.

Some of the achievements of vice indeed may be difficult, but how can plain and simple virtue, put us upon such hardships in the practice. An ambitious spirit requires great and slavish attendance, whilst humility is served with any thing that providence shall cast in its way. Malice puts all our faculties upon the rack, whilst charity keeps them in their natural temper, quiet and sedate.

In a word, let any man judge, if it must not be a more difficult task, to humour all the extravagant and imperious lusts of the flesh, than to mortify and restrain them, that is, to keep them within the limits of peace and decorum. And why is it that our Saviour so kindly invites us to follow his example, Mat. xi. *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you*
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and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light? but because a meek and lowly disposition of soul will make every yoke and burden light and easy.

To conclude; Consider upon that inward consolation of mind, which will arise from the security of our eternal interest by our firm and unchangeable resolutions of an holy life; this may even prevail upon sensual men who have a right *Gusto* of truest pleasure and enjoyment. For the remaining part of our lives will then be easy and satisfactory: irresolution and inconsistency being the greatest disturbers of our human estate; and frequent lapses and falling back into sin, that we have promised and vowed and strongly resolv'd against, daily interrupting the peace and tranquillity of our souls and consciences.

If we are under any troublesome and distrustful thoughts, what is it, but that we fear for the future? and that certainly it cannot go well with us, if there be a judgment to come? for we are not yet hardy enough by a thorough infidelity wholly to disbelieve that we have a long catalogue of sins, not yet accounted for in this life; and we cannot but be suspicious and afraid of another.

Let us then try the expedient of putting an end to these grieving perplexities, by resolving in this great point to be fully persuaded in our minds of all the truths of our religion, and to be entirely obedient in our wills and affections to all its rules and commands, and we shall soon experience

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perience the *gain of godliness*, how greatly and sensibly our satisfactions will advance; and a solid and lasting contentment soon be established. We shall have the good wish of *St. Paul* in the verse next to the text of being *not only almost, but altogether such Christians* as he was, and without bonds; that is, if I may be allowed to paraphrase with allusion to the words and to our present purpose, without those vexations and anxieties that are the bonds and fetters of an irresolute Christianity: we shall live upon the borders of paradise, and have an earnest in this world of that eternal bliss and happiness in the next, which is prepared for all those that keep up to their holy resolutions; that will never be satisfied by being Almost till they are Altogether Christians.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, thro' the assistance of his holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ's sake, to whom Father, Son and Holy Ghost be ascribed all praise, majesty, and adoration, now and for ever more. *Amen.*



S E R M O N X I I .

Preached at *Christ-Church Canterbury*,
On St. PAUL's *Conversion*.

Of Trying and Proving our Religion.

I T H E S. V. 21.

Prove all things, — Hold fast that which is good.

C H R I S T I A N I T Y was ever fair in all its proposals. It owes not its foundation to any precarious principles: It never stood in need of a fearful superstition or a fanciful imagination to swell it up into credulity: It begs no favour, bespeaks no countenance to support it, without justifying its cause: It defies all allowances and concessions that are any diminution to a solid rational faith and persuasion. Every Christian may easily come to the knowledge of salvation, and be soon instructed in the whole mystery of godliness, so as to be able to *give a reason* both of his *faith* and *hope* in Christ Jesus.

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In its primitive innocence it was always ready to stand to a tryal, and now tho' at so great a distance from its first evidences, it will not decline the strictest examination. *Prove all things*, prove the religion itself by the exactest criterions that can be made, by the most subtile scrutinies of reason: prove its profelytes and followers by the most rigid persecutions, even fiery tryals: Christianity is every way proof against all both objection and opposition: neither its faith nor its followers were ever baffled by the reasons and philosophy of the best, or by the ruder usage and malice of its worst enemies.

The holy Spirit himself, tho' attended with an almighty power of miracles, condescends to appear before any court of tryals: hath himself given forth the commission, *Try the spirits*, saith the Holy Ghost, 1 *John* iv. 1. *whether they are of God* — That the distinction may be fair and visible, betwixt the Spirit of God, and that of the many false prophets who were then gone out into the world. And if such exact search and enquiry was to be made when the Holy Ghost was shed abroad in such illustrious manifestations, surely we ought to look more narrowly to all modern pretences of the spirit.

Then there was a *demonstration of the spirit and of power*, as our Apostle expresses it, 1 *Cor.* ii. 4. Satisfaction was made to the very senses of men by the performance of almighty demonstrating wonders. Now, tho' the same Spirit presides in his church and in the hearts of good Christians, yet we look not for the same sensible

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ble proofs; and be sure all high-flown pretences of miracles and infusions, speaking or acting things out of the common course of reason and natural abilities, can amount to nothing of proof in our Christian religion; but may justly raise suspicion: being more likely signs of imposture, we must therefore go back to its first establishment for the tryal of doctrines. But let us see what authority we have for *proving*, and what satisfaction we shall find therein from the words of the Text; *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*; in which we have

I. A permission, *Prove all things.*

II. A precept, *Hold fast that which is good.*

I. As to the allowance of *proving*, I call it a permission, tho' it be as imperative in the Text, as the other command of *holding fast that which is good*; Πάντα δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε. But reason must necessarily make a distinction; we must not be always trying, which denotes unsettlement; nor ought every scruple, vain curiosity, affectation and prejudice, put us upon *trying* and *proving*: Nor hath every peevish illiterate, and discontented wretch a commission to be a searcher in these divine matters.

But to *hold fast that which is good*, is a precept without limitation, upon all persons and at all times obliging, never to let that go, however the tryal goes in other matters. There are various

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various limitations that must be admitted as checks upon this permission. As

1. It may very reasonably be questioned, whether a licence to *prove all things*, be granted to all Christians in common, or only to the prelates and rulers of the church, to pastors and spiritual guides, such as are wise and judicious in discerning truth from appearance and falsehood, and must be allowed to have power in the church to determine for the preservation of unity and order, and to oblige all inferior members to a submission, at least a passive acquiescence for the prevention of schism and confusion. This seems most probable, as may be conjectur'd from the context at the 14th and 15th verses; where his speech is directed to those that are in some authority: *Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak*; such, as you may easily guess, are mighty unqualified to be judges or tryers for themselves; and *see that none render evil for evil*: such as do so, can never be good casuists, must not be entrusted with *proving* or *deciding* any points, either of faith or practice. A toleration therefore to *all* in this matter could never be intended; because disorder and contention, and mere libertinism must necessarily follow, and so a church or society of Christian believers could never have been established and settled.

2. If *proving* and *trying* were a general allowance, yet must it be confin'd to these first times of the Apostles, when all was upon the test: The whole frame and constitution of the Christian

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stian religion was under tryal and examination, whether it should be admitted or rejected, and what plea could be made for, and what evidences could be given of its divine authority. The *Jewish* religion could plead that divine authority, and also a long prescription, tho' it had been basely corrupted from its originals, and commonly the old is better in sacred matters, at least ought not to be superseded (without a fair tryal) by any new establishment that is not attested with the highest evidences both of reason and revelation. Likewise at this time *many false prophets were gone out into the world*. The *Gnosticks* and followers of *Simon Magus* were high pretenders to divine knowledge, to illuminations, and the working of miracles, and therefore it concern'd the Apostles to put the doctrines on all sides upon a tryal, and indeed to give it out as an injunction to all believers to *prove all things*, before they admitted them into their faith and persuasion. Be sure, on a strict and rational examination with due application to God, the right cause would get the better. And tho' there may be a struggle for a while betwixt the *Apostles* and the *Hereticks*, as betwixt *Moses* and the *Magicians* of *Egypt*, or *Elijah* and the *priests of Baal*; yet the cause of God would certainly carry it at last: for truth ought to prevail, because it hath always sound reason upon its side; but is irresistible when it is demonstrated: and even divine mysteries are such, as to the truth of them, when they are asserted by the infallible veracity of God, and avouched by his Almighty power, altho'

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tho' we may not be able to give an explanatory account of their nature.

Besides, the canon of Scripture, (I mean that of the New Testament) when this liberty for *trying* and *proving* was given forth, was not then settled; and the church was but just raising and building up, on the foundation of Christ and his Apostles; and there was no reason for the believing any of them all from their own mouths, farther than they could justify their authority and mission from God. Our Lord himself desir'd in this case, John x. 37, 38. *If I do not the works of my father, believe, me not; but if I do, tho' ye believe not me, believe the works: That ye may know and believe that the father is in me, and I in him:* And yet after all, notwithstanding this necessary permission of *proving* and trying *all things* in these unsettled times of the Christian church, a just and reasonable privilege of every man who is requir'd to embrace a new religion, our Apostle hath elsewhere taken care that it be not abused or licentiously made use of.

They must not be always *proving*, but after a due and reasonable tryal of doctrines, ought to acquiesce in the determinations of their superiors and duly appointed teachers. In the ii. chap. of the 2d. *Epistle* to the *Thess.* after some account of the *day of Christ being at hand*, that is, his second coming to judgment upon the *Jews*; of the *man of sin*, or *son of perdition* (which some commentators have called Anti-christ) that was soon to be *revealed*; of the *strong delusion* that God should send upon those that *believed not*
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the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness; all which had been doubtful and perplexing enquiries amongst them, and had shaken and dissettled their minds; to fix them, he concludes with this advice or command; *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our Epistle.* Traditions were then of the like authority with the Scriptures now (tho' we can go no farther with the Church of Rome in that comparison) and were sufficient to oblige and determine to a submission in all doubtful matters. So, 1 Cor. xi. 1. we meet with a charge of the same import: *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,* and ver. 2. he encourages them with commendation upon this submission; *Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances* (or traditions, as in the Margin) *as I delivered them to you.* Therefore tho' *proving all things* was their privilege (and but reason too) upon their first entrance upon a new religion which was the Christian: and the Apostles design'd nothing but fair dealing; yet there must be some end put to this curiosity and solicitude, else little of the substance and true ends of Christianity will be carried on: They ought to make quick dispatch in these enquiries, in *proving and trying*, that they may the sooner fall upon the greater and more indispensable business, of laying hold on that which is good: A more preferable reading therefore that we meet with, embraced before the common one by the best commentators, seems to express

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express as much, Πάρτα δοκιμάζοντες, *proving all things*, (which sounds not so commanding) if there be occasion, and when it is necessary; and that difficulty being cast out of the way in one act, then follows the more express and permanent command: *hold fast that which is good.*

But without clogging this Christian privilege of *proving all things* with any more clauses of limitation; we will consider it in respect to all Christians, and at all times of the Church.

Religion is of the deepest concern to us; and a man would be willing to be satisfied in all that relates to it; because the great subject matter of it is everlasting life and everlasting death. *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*, says our Apostle, (Rom. xiv. 5.) in respect to very indifferent things in their own nature, but such as bore a near relation to religion: And pronounces verse the last, that *whatsoever is not of faith*, i. e. not done out of that full persuasion and satisfaction of mind, *is sin.*

But tho' we should turn the permission into an absolute precept and command, and so *proving all things* were not only a christian privilege, but a christian duty: yet still we shall stand in need of some limitations, and more especially in relation to those that are most apt to claim this privilege, or most zealous and forward in what they will rather call a duty of *proving all things*: For we must for ever exclude from this office of trying, those that are utterly unqualified for it.

Tho' the christian religion lies open and fair to

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to all to be examined and looked into; yet ignorant and illiterate wretches, which make up far the greatest part of mankind, are not sufficient to be its judges or tryers: And it is contrary to all law and reason in such cases, that malicious and prejudiced persons, which make up another great party, should be admitted as such. Therefore,

1. As Ideots and mad-men are by no means able to prove any thing, so the ignorant and indocile multitude, who are as unqualified to judge in religious, as to govern in civil matters, must certainly be insufficient for proving all things. For the Scriptures must be the rule they must prove by; and there is all the reason in the world they should be put into their hands, because they are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*; God forbid they should not have the use of them for these excellent purposes, for the settlement of every particular man in the fundamentals of faith and practice, therein plainly delivered to common reason and apprehension. But in difficult and mysterious points, in stating and settling all the doctrines of faith and the laws of Church-communion, Church-authority, &c. originally in Christ and his Apostles, and from them descendant to their successors, and many other requisites of divine knowledge foreign to vulgar understanding, so as to prescribe to others; it is impossible they should be judges sufficient to determine

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termine from the holy Scriptures, when, beside many other instances of their incapacities, they do not understand one tittle of those original languages in which they were written: And yet we may observe among our *Sectaries*, especially the lower ranks of them, none set up so much for *tryers* and *provers* as they; no *Pope* or Councils so infallible, no learned expositors so dogmatical and determining. And, what makes the absurdity most monstrous, many of them have no translation of their own, but must take it from that Church, the communion with which in every thing else they utterly abominate. They would have it thought indeed that the *spirit*, and some that the *light within them*, doth keep them right in that matter, to the true sense and meaning of the Scriptures: but it is still more wonderful that they will confide in that spirit and light, which contrary to their own spirits, and all their inclinations, is so conformable to the Church, as to take from *her* the conveyance of the word of God from the sacred fountains; which is one of the greatest trusts that can be reposed in her. Besides, if new inspiration be their conduct in *proving all things*, that can be no guide to others, unless attested by some miracle, and the most useful and apposite one would be the gift of languages; whereas few, very few of those understand their own.

2. Passion and prejudice make us as insufficient judges and tryers in divine matters, as ignorance, and are much more malignant, more imperious and prescribing, and commonly in the
wrong

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wrong in spite of all the reason in the world. Ignorance is itself some plea that it is not ruled by reason ; but passion and prejudice are commonly the highest pretenders to it, and yet in constant and willful rebellion against it : And commonly too, the less and more insignificant are the occasions given, or the matters they are conversant about, the higher they fly, and become the more wrangling and outrageous. As soon as these are up immediately the man falls to *proving* and trying ; and if the pet be taken from any thing or person that bears a more immediate relation to the profession of religion, he soon makes it his business to find fault, or fall out with the communion he is of ; and a little matter farther will bring him to renounce it, unless he is more closely tied to it by some superior interest or ambitious design, which he can never renounce : and so the knave and hypocrite keeps a plausible and complemental conformity to that church, which he secretly hates and reviles.

But in case it can otherwise be as well accommodated to his worldly interest, he goes off with flying colours, and crying up this *christian privilege* and Scripture-charter (as he will have it) of *trying the spirits*, and *proving all things* : And into whatsoever community he lights, it is a great venture but that he is an hypocrite still ; for true conversion (which is always pretended) must be founded upon true reason ! and separation is a most heinous sin, nulls and makes void all piety and devotion, when it can be justified by no other proofs and arguments, but what

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are suggested by the passions and actuated by the interest of the world.

Whatever was the origin of diffention from us, it is notorious that the common starters now, are usually men disgusted, or cross'd in some expectations that are secular and worldly; tho' reason and Scripture authority are pleaded afterwards: Some just demands have been (as they would have it thought) rigorously made upon them, or they have been worsted by some legal proceedings, and forced to righteous dealing or retribution: Some accidental quarrel or discontent hath put them out of humour; and then they fall upon their old religion, and seek out for a new one. The petty occasions and prejudices are over-looked that first wrought the change; and all passes for zeal and devotion; their eyes are opened, and their hearts are enlarged towards God.

Thus malecontents in a common-wealth when disappointed, or disgusted by those that are in authority, or justly suffering under the penalties of the law, turn fractious politicians, and nothing will serve their turns, whatever comes on't, but destroying the old, and setting up a new model of government: And there is a brutish rabble ever ready to caress them, as great patriots and lovers of their country; and be sure such like persons are in no ways fit to make *tryers* and *provers* in holy matters, who in the whole cause of God and his religion, are so much swayed by their own passions and prejudices, and stubborn ignorance.

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Having thus given you the limitations, FIRST, as to the privilege or duty, (by which name soever you think fit to call it) of *proving all things*; SECONDLY, as to the abilities and qualifications of those who are most forward and presuming in the exercise of it: I come, in the THIRD place, to the true rule and method that must be admitted, (when there is just occasion for it) for the *proving all things*. Unless we are secure in the rule of *proving*, the conclusion or product will be false or uncertain: And unless we have judgment and skill to make use of that rule, it can of itself stand us in no stead.

The Scriptures were ever acknowledged by all orthodox Christians to be the rule of faith for *proving all things*, i. e. all the doctrines and precepts of Christian religion, and all the essentials of a Christian Church, and we need argue no farther upon that point. But reason must be called in for the management of this rule, otherwise it will prove to be, what some *Enthusiasts* of old called it, but a *dead letter*, till we have argued out its divine authority.

The Disciples and first converts to Christian religion had demonstration and satisfaction made to their very senses by the power of miracles, and yet, after all, they must reason themselves into perswasion and conviction upon these topicks of arguing, *viz.*

1. That the miracles were so transcendent, that they could be wrought by no other than an Almighty hand.

2. That there could be no delusion nor im-
position

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position upon the senses ; for the effects were palpable, visible, and lasting.

3. That the author of this religion, who wrought the miracles for its confirmation, lived up to all the heights of virtue and true piety : his life as far transcending, in inherent holiness and the brightest innocence, the lives of the best moralists among men, as his miracles did the common course and order of nature.

4. That he left a law behind him, consisting of the most pious doctrines and precepts for the faith and practice of men, to bring them to the truest knowledge of God, to raise them into his favour and love, and to make them capable of what blessings he shall think fit for them in this life, and will without reserve abundantly confer upon them in the life to come.

5. *Lastly*, That all this could be done upon no present designs of profit or honour ; unless to run through all the difficulties and sufferings of human life, and to be crucified as an infamous malefactor, do answer all the purposes and ends of ambition and worldly interest.

Thus, tho' the revelation be the foundation of our faith, yet when we come to the business of proving our religion in general, or any single truths contained in it, we must do it by calling in the assistance of reason ; which must produce and weigh all those evidences we have for the truth of the holy Scriptures, that contain and set forth this divine revelation of the will of God.

Our Apostle's conversion was owing to that signal manifestation Christ Jesus made of himself,

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self, to equal him by a miraculous evidence to the rest of the Apostles, and make him a *chosen vessel*, when in his journey to *Damascus*, upon the worst of designs, even against any religion, i. e. persecution; *a light from heaven shone round about him, above the brightness of the sun*, with an astonishing voice of reprehension, which cast him into amazement and ecstasy, and blindness for three days: But *Ananias* a devout and religious man, was by another vision order'd to attend upon him, and more fully to explain the vision; by whose ministration he came out of his astonishment, forthwith was restored to his sight, filled with the Holy Ghost, and solemnly initiated into the Christian faith and communion by baptism. Here the foundation was laid by divine authority, attested by the highest evidence, even vision and demonstration: But it is lawful, and indeed absolutely necessary, for reason to come in and argue upon this authority. And this was St. Paul's method upon all occasions, *Acts* xvii. 2. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them*, that is, a Synagogue of the Jews, and *three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures*, and again, chap. xviii. ver. 4. *he came to Corinth, and reasoned in the Synagogue every sabbath, and perswaded the Jews and the Greeks*: And ver. 19. after some time he came to *Ephesus*, and *entered into the Synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews*. And *Acts*, xxiv. 25. By the power of his reasonings he cast a great man, and a great sinner, into a *fit of trembling*. His discourses were no

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popular cant or jargon, but all solid *reasonings*; and the same rational series of arguing upon *Revelation*, is observable through all his *Epistles*. And as we must *prove* the truth of our religion, its whole frame and constitution, by our reason; and the more we can say or plead for it, so much the more are we convinced in our own understandings, and enabled to convince others: Our faith grows the stronger and is of the greater influence upon our lives and conversations, and then our Lord's reasoning will be an obliging duty upon us, *Luke xxii. 32.* When *we are converted, that we strengthen our brethren.*

So then in all doubtful points relating to that religion, we must apply ourselves to reason for satisfaction; and in this we attribute no superiority to it over the Scriptures, only a priority or precedence; as the law of nature which is the unwritten law of God is antecedent to all divine positive laws: And reason too, if we could keep it pure and uncorrupted hath the same origin; *The spirit of man* (saith the wise man, *Prov. xx. 27.*) *is the candle of the Lord.* For before revelation or Scripture can pass with rational men for the will of God, or as proceeding from the divine authority, their reason must set forward first towards the conviction, and inform them upon the evidences given, that they are truly so: And the reason and revelation together become a full and entire testimony, and will oblige our faith and submission, beyond all authority whatsoever. So argues our judicious

Hooker in his justly admired book of *Ecclesiastical*

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cal Policy: 'Altho' ten thousand general Councils should set down one and the same definitive sentence concerning any point of religion whatsoever; yet one demonstrative reason alleged, or one testimony cited from the word of God himself to the contrary, could not chuse but oversway them all: In as much as for them to be deceived, it is not so impossible, as it is that demonstrative reason and divine testimony should deceive.'

Neither doth this advance of reason any way derogate from the authority of the church; for right reason in all matters that require *proving* and *trying*, will direct us to the true *Catholick Church*, for both our information and settlement; will send us to the first *general Councils* (before the times of *Romish* corruptions) for all their determinations of doctrine and discipline, and be sure will be inclined to attribute not only higher authority, but also a greater superiority of reason to those venerable Assemblies, than to its own single judgment and understanding. Reason will likewise advise us and direct us, to consult the primitive fathers that were nearest the times of Christ and his Apostles, for the truest interpretation of the holy Scriptures, and the best account of the faith and practice of those holy Christians, and the constitution of their church, which ought to be our pattern. In a word, Reason, if it be what it should be, and pursues (as it is natural) all the means and methods of conviction, will seek out for all helps and assistances divine and human;

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and therefore, fully to complete our faith and perswasion, will not fail to pray for, and endeavour to obtain the spirit and grace of God; because the holy Scriptures, the divine authority of which it hath already acknowledged, have prescribed the absolute necessity of this assistance, and given assurance that it shall be the gift to those that ask as they ought to do, and have qualified themselves for it.

But now, after all, the greatest difficulty will be to set our reason right for this great work of *proving all things*: unless we can single it off from our passions and sensual appetites, it will prove in all likelihood a very corrupt as well as an incompetent judge in divine matters. And this the great design and purpose of our Christian religion, that reason, not sin, may reign in our mortal bodies; that we may be reduced or brought back to the image of God; which image of our great Creator is our rational soul: had not that been vitiated and miserably defaced by our unhappy fall, we might have stood in no need of revelation. So then all the holy dispositions of soul, all the most virtuous practices that are recommended in our Christian religion, that do denominate a good man, a man of true and undesigning moderation; all that St. Paul calls the *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. v. 22, 23.) *Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*, are every one of them necessary qualifications for our reason, to enable it for, and keep it regular in, this great undertaking of *proving all things*. And if we should

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should rightly reckon up the contrary dispositions and practices to these we have now named, which I will tempt if I can hit on them, *viz.* ill-nature, founels, inquietness, haughtiness, forwardness, impatience, unfaithfulness, hot and intemperate zeal, which makes up a great part of of some mens religion, at least are great ingredients in the profession, as thinking they betoken warmth and vigour in its cause: They are the very ill-humours that put men upon querulous and unnecessary trying and proving, at the same time so pervert and blind their reason, as to render them utterly unqualified and insufficient for the performance; and so only muddle the cause. Our Lord would not allow the zeal of *James* and *John* to determine the fate of that rude and inhospitable village of *Samaria*: They were good men and their resentment just, but anger made them unfit judges in the case: Their Lord and master was personally affronted, which was highly provoking; but vengeance was quite beside the gospel dispensation; the injury is pass'd over, and the disciples are sharply rebuked: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*

To conclude: I will cast all the moral qualifications for *proving* into one, and let that be *charity*, as it denotes our love both to God and man; without which our Apostle (*Cor. i. 13.*) will not allow the spirit of God with all his miraculous performances to *profit* any thing; and be sure then ought always to be conjoin'd with our reason, when it sits in judgment, and both together cannot fail in *proving all things* with such
that

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happy success as may be certain to *hold fast that which is good*; I will give its character out of the fore-mentioned chapter, at the 4th and following verses; and then judge yourselves, whether it will not make *reason* sufficient for the business in hand: *Charity suffereth long and is kind, charity envyeth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* In the name of God, Let reason take its utmost scope and liberty in proving and judging all things, so long as it keeps to these measures: our religion and church can suffer no diminution either in honour or authority, but will be made more illustrious both in truth and innocence, as often soever as they shall be summon'd before such a tribunal; and from hence I should pass to the other part of the Text, the happy effect of *proving all things*, that we might *hold fast that which is good*; but that is a large subject of itself, and will require more time than now remains; and therefore so much for this.

Now to God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
be ascribed, &c. *Amen.*



S E R.

S E R M O N XIII.

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I T H E S. V. 21.

Prove all things, — Hold fast that which is good.

I A M now, according to promise, to speak on the second part of these words; *Hold fast that which is good*: but must not so far flight the coherence, as to disjoin two duties, that have such a necessary dependance one upon the other, and do by an easy exposition contain the two great essentials of Christian religion, faith and good life; which do constitute it a wise and rational religion, because they imply an entire devotion of the whole man unto God.

1st. The understanding or reason is convinced and brought over, after due search and *proof* of all things, which is faith and persuasion: And then,

2^{dly}.

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2dly. In an orderly course, the will and affections, or passions, follow in due and regular obedience; which bring forth those works of righteousness that are the necessary fruits of a sound faith and conviction, or, according to the import of the words together, do effect and lay hold on that *good*, which ought to be the product of all *proof* and *enquiry*: Therefore the more preferable reading makes them one sentence Πάντα δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε: *Trying or proving all things, hold fast that which is good.*

Now as *James* tells us, and reason makes it demonstrative, that *faith without works is dead*; that is, tho' it pass as theory and speculation, and look like a sort of knowledge, and is transacted in the superior faculties of the mind, the reason and intellect; yet is it inactive and lumpish, like the body without the soul, if it doth not bring forth good fruits; which are the only indications of a *sound* and lively faith: so *searching* and *proving* may make a fair shew and appearance of sagacity and diligence about religious matters, but, like *St. James's faith without works*, is altogether *dead*, the mere skeleton of religion, or to pursue the metaphor, the anatomizing or mangling of it into such minute parts as are never to be reunited; unless such a regard be always had to the substantial good that ought to arise from it, that we hold it fast, and are never satisfied in all our enquiries, till we have got the full possession of it: *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*

To

To introduce then the necessity of this duty of *holding fast that which is good*, as of the greater and more general obligation of the two, you must bear with the shortest repetition I can possibly make, of what I have already discour-
led upon the former words, (for it would be presumption to say you may remember). As

1. That the Christian religion in its first establishment lay fair and open to the examination of all men.

2. That Faith, that is the submission of the understanding, was never required till the reason, and at that time the very senses of men, were fully convinced and satisfied.

3. That the Holy Ghost did not decline the strictest scrutiny, but gave out the commission himself for the *trying of spirits*.

So that *proving all things* is so far from prejudicing our religion, that it will make the faith of Christ the more illustrious, and the more close and narrow the search is made, the more satisfactory will prove the discovery; as it hath been observ'd, that deep knowledge and enquiry begets and establishes the belief of a Deity; but Atheism, tho', like the *Leviathan*, it would be thought to sport it in the deep, yet plays about only in the shallows, and according to the usual fate of that monster (or his likeness) is soon run aground and confounded.

But this allowance or *permission of proving all things* (as it ought rather to be called than a duty indispensable, or always obliging) must of necessity fall under some restraints and limitations. For

1. This

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1. This licence would soon be turn'd into libertinism; and disorder and confusion would be the consequence, if it were granted to all Christians in common, and in all matters of debate: It seems by the context (*ver. 14, 15.*) most proper, or rather confin'd to the prebts and rulers of the church, to pastors and spiritual guides, such as are more wise to discern, and have authority to determine: *Warn them that are unruly, &c.*

2. *Proving and Trying* was an allowance of greater necessity in those times, than it can be in these, when all was upon the test; the whole frame and constitution of Christian religion was under tryal and examination; and many false prophets were gone out into the world, with Satan* at the head of them, to perplex and confound the truth (before it was fix'd and established) with heresy and imposture: But now the canon of the Scriptures is fully settled, and a Christian church more distinguishably constituted, and we know whither to go for all reasonable satisfaction in the fundamentals of religion. And then too stedfastness was enjoin'd, and *holding the traditions they had been taught, and keeping the ordinances as they had been delivered unto them, and holding fast the profession of their faith without wavering*; with many other injunctions given forth for their submission to authority and better instruction.

3. There must of necessity be a limitation of time

* Πολλὴ γὰρ τότε τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν ἦν φόρα τῇ Διαβόλου φιλονεικῆσθαι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ τὸ ψεῦδος. Græc. Schol.

time for the proving all things, or else we shall be in a continual fluctuation, so far from *holding fast*, that we shall never come at the *good* of Christianity; learning and trying, doubting and disputing, should be dispatch'd with all the quickness we possibly can, that we might the sooner fall to religious practice, for which the longest life is too short: yet some men's zeal and devotion (to call it what they think it) is wholly exhausted in religious enquiries, before they have taken one step towards a religious life, in *seeking* without *finding*, ever learning, but never *coming to the knowledge of the truth*.

Besides these circumstantial restraints, there is an utter incapacity, either natural or moral, in a great part of the world for the exercising of this privilege of proving all things. For

(1.) Illiterate and ignorant persons must certainly be insufficient for *proving all things*: and tho' they are not apt to own it (for ignorance is seldom humble), yet the modest answer of *Candace's* Eunuch to St. *Philip* on such occasions would better become them, *Acts* viii. 31. *How can we understand* the Scriptures that we read, *except some men should guide us*: And of this incapacity I have already given reasons and instances at large.

(2.) *Passion* and *prejudice* (we observ'd) made as ill judges and tryers in divine matters as *ignorance*, and that want of good temper is as unhappy an insufficiency as want of knowledge: Conceit of themselves and ill-nature to others are the usual prepossessions of such men, and they will

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will be sure to wrest the Scriptures to their own obstinate opinions and inclinations, tho' it may prove to their own destruction, rather than be pliant and conformable to prescribed rules of unity and order.

But to come to a close, notwithstanding these seasonable and prudential limitation of this privilege of *proving all things*, Christian religion will not decline an appearance and tryal before the tribunal of human reason; a blind and implicate faith is as great a contradiction to the gospel, as darkness is to light, indeed the very same, as it is itself, *that great light is come into the world*. Nay, the whole revelation (the grand precept of which was humility, and whose author, tho' a God, was the greatest example of it) is likewise subject to the reason of every man: no force was ever intended upon our understandings, no submissions ever required, nor could be acceptable without consent and persuasion.

Now sound reason is not only the readiest and surest proselyte to Christian religion, but will persevere to the end, will continue stedfast in all its doctrines and precepts. It may examine rigidly and nicely all the original motives of credibility, but then it more firmly fixes and establishes our faith; thinks it no undervaluing or degrading submission to believe mysteries, or what we cannot so comprehend, as to give an explicate account of them, so long as it is satisfied in the truth of the revelation: For true reason knows its own strength, and will not undertake to unravel the secrets of heaven, but concludes what
is

is beyond its own reach may not be an impossibility or a contradiction, but the easy and adequate object of infinite knowledge; and then upon divine authority, ought to be the unquestionable subject of our faith. Sound reason is humble and resigning in difficult points, not confiding wholly in its own judgment, sends us to the primitive Catholick Church, or that church which is now most exactly constituted according to the primitive pattern; as well knowing that a whole society and body of men, such as were nearest the time of Christ and his Apostles, or such as now go by the same rule, are better able to judge, and have more authority to determine than any single person.

So that true reason, what e'er some puny pretenders to it may in vanity and affectation argue, will make us the most orthodox Christians; preserve us from launching out into schisms and heresies; secure the greater purposes of Christianity, the peace and unity of a religious society; and hath ever prov'd a true and just defender, and champion (as we may say) to our *established Church*. For it hath *never* fail'd to baffle and confound the pretended reasonings and wrangling oppositions of all her adversaries. In fine, as that is esteem'd the truest wisdom that directs our actions towards the best and most glorious ends; so certainly the truest and soundest reason will make the quickest dispatch in all the preliminaries and superficials of disputing, and trying, and proving, in matters of our Christian religion, and immediatly fall upon the substan-

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tial good, the grand and glorious end of the whole revelation, which is the reformation of our lives, for the salvation of our souls. If we will be rul'd by reason, the truest and soundest reason, after due and rational examination and proof of all things relating to faith and good life, Let us

II. *Hold fast that which is good.*

This is a precept and duty without limitation, upon all persons and at all times indispensably obliging, never to let that go, however the tryal goes in other matters. If we miscarry here, all is lost: and Christian knowledge, and all the bustle and enquiries we have made about that religion, will prove the greater aggravation of our guilt, and sink us into a lower condition and more miserable estate than that of Heathens and Infidels, for whom it must be more tolerable at the day of judgment who have not known, than for us who have sufficiently known, at least have been abundantly taught, but not *obeyed the Gospel of God*. Another aggravation of our guilt in this case will be, that the good of our religion is so easy to come at, that there is no obstacle in our way. Many doubts and scruples in trying and proving may for some time hinder or check the rise of our faith and persuasion: Allowances have been frequently made for diffidence and distrust, as ever thought a greater indication of wisdom and judgment, as well as tenderness of spirit, than over-forwardness and confidence in believing all things. And the faith of that distrustful believer in the gospel, who

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who said, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*, was acceptable, as sufficient for the cure that so much depended upon it.

But religious practice lies open and plain to every man; there are no doubts or queries can arise, whether we should *be holy in all manner of conversation*: every one knows, that knows any thing, what disposition of mind and heart he ought to be of, and what duties he ought to put in practice, that he may be accepted of God, and live according to his will; tho' he be not able to make an exposition on his Creed in every point; or tho' his faith, like that of the fore-mentioned confessor, hath a tremulous mixture of unbelief.

Nay, the obligations to a virtuous and holy life, as a most rational consequence, will follow, tho' we allow a greater proportion of unbelief in the composition; because the natural principles of self-interest and preservation, which move and incite us in all the actions of our present life, would prompt us to secure ourselves by a conversation conformable to the laws of religion, tho' we did but faintly believe the promised rewards and threatened punishments of another world.

But, I must not let go the dependence, that I have observ'd hitherto, of these two duties one upon another, of *proving all things, and holding fast that which is good*. As it hath therefore been observ'd already, that the deeper the search is in divine matters, and the closer the proof is made; the good that we are to lay hold

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on, will be the more discernible and inviting: and that it is the *Fool, that says in his heart There is no God*; the wise and learned are better taught: so certainly the stronger the faith is, the greater power and influence it will have upon our lives and conversations. Therefore Faith in Scripture is used in so comprehensive a sense, that *receiving the faith, embracing the faith, being justified by faith, holding fast the profession of our faith*, and such like expressions do denote the *whole duty* of a christian man; as well a conformable practice to, as a full belief of those things that are delivered in the Gospel. And for that reason the frequent declarations of our faith, and repetition of our Creeds were ever used in the offices of the Church, as an inseparable part of divine worship, and ought to be express'd with the same elevation of soul and adoration of God, as the most sublime and pathetick invocation; Because

1. Every such confession is a most solemn agnition of the *being* and *power* of God, and of the truth of all those mysteries of his revelation that are past or yet to come, and also a fresh engagement, that we will stand and abide by this faith and acknowledgement; And

2. Because every particular Article doth bear a long with it a powerful persuasive to live as we believe. If the understanding be fully convinced, it is a shame to a rational being, not to bring over the inferior servile faculties, the will and affections, to be obedient to the dictates of that faith. One would think it an impossibility.

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For how can a man say, he *believes in God*, that there is such an infinite being furrounded with all those attributes of power and wisdom, justice and goodness, which must in infinite perfection belong unto him, and not every minute tremble at the apprehension, lest he should miscarry in any one action of his life, by which he might forfeit his favour and fall under his displeasure; believing (or but surmising) that he can everlastingly save, and everlastingly destroy? How can a man solemnly declare that he *believes in Jesus Christ*, that *he was the Son of God, sent into the world upon that grand design of our redemption*, to deliver us from the everlasting wrath of God, to which sin had made us liable, and to purchase for us an eternal crown of glory, to the possession of which the highest perfections and merits of men could never entitle them: and in order to this great design hath enter'd into a covenant of grace or favour with us, all the hard and rigorous conditions of which he hath performed himself; and hath left us the gentle and placid ones of obedience to his laws, such as will promote even our present well-being, as well as capacitate us for his future glory? How, I say, can a man declare that he fully believes this great *mystery* of our redemption; (and 'tis but the Creed the Christian professor repeats every day) and doth not at the instant with a strenuous and active zeal, labour to make interest with this blessed Jesus, the *sole author and finisher of our faith and salvation*, and with all industry and solicitude enquire into his laws, that he might strictly and

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punctually observe them; lest he should lose his share in these merits of an almighty Saviour, and fall by his own willful folly and stupid neglect into everlasting perdition!

This consequence seems to be imply'd in the words of St. John, 1 Epist. iv. 2. *Hereby know ye the spirit of God, every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. Confessing with the mouth*, in an honest and primitive meaning, includes *believing in the heart*, (Rom. x. 9.) and that *Christ is come in the flesh*, comprehends all the purposes and designs for which he was sent, and all the articles of faith thereunto belonging: so then a full conviction of this great truth must be the truest indication of the spirit of God, and will manifest itself in a conversation conformable to the example and precepts of the son of God that came into the flesh, and assum'd our nature, in order to our redemption.

Of such a happy texture and composition is the whole frame and constitution of our Christian religion, (for that reason is it the great wisdom of God in a mystery) that every article of faith is both a rule and an inducement to good living; and natural reason upon a full belief of the doctrines of Christianity, must certainly suggest the obligation to all piety and morality; and common principles of self-love and preservation must put us upon the necessity of *living soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world*, as our Apostle urges, upon the prospect of another, viz. *Looking for that blessed*

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blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of that great God, and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Tit. ii. 12, 13.

I might instance in every single article of our Creed, and shew you what necessary obligation to practice must flow from a sound belief of every one of them; and therefore it nearly concerns us to put ourselves upon the strictest search and enquiry, by all rational and unprejudiced ways of trying and proving, into all the doctrines and revealed truths of our most holy religion, for the raising and building up our faith as high as we can, that its influence may be powerful and extensive over our whole lives and conversations; because the stronger our faith comes forth, the more ardent and animated will our desires be towards holiness, and its promised reward of glory: and also the greater and more tremendous will be our horror of sin and its dreadful effects of everlasting torments: and this in the sum and product is that *good* in the Text we are to *lay hold* on.

But it is no wonder, that *good* should be rais'd upon so *good* a foundation: it is so diffus'd thro' the whole creation, that evil itself is often-times productive of it. As it denotes the power and wisdom of divine providence to ordain *good* out of evil, so is it in a great measure, and in innumerable instances left to the power and will of man, so to order his affairs, and govern the occurrences of his life, that every evil that befalls him may turn to good account, and bring him good profit and

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advantage, provided we do not do evil with that intent that good may come on't.

All evils but those of sin may be the occasions, or opportunities, or instruments, and sometimes the very causes of good; except when we are depriv'd of our reason and senses, and cut short of our time to improve them; nay, even of two evils, the lesser is comparatively good, and makes our choice of it to be reasonable and wise.

Philosophy tells us, all evils are embraced under the appearance of good, that nature cannot incline us or prompt us to chuse evil as evil: but we have here to do with no other sort of good but what is really and substantially such. So afflictions and sufferings from God, are the evils of punishment, but in their effects transcendently good, if we answer the kind purposes of heaven, and if we do not, we are accountable for them, as for positive blessings, and are chargeable with sinful ingratitude: because to chastise and correct, implies the nearest concern of fatherly love and affection. And indeed what can be a greater good for us, than to rouse us into consideration and reflection, to put us upon second and better thoughts, and in a word, make us wise unto salvation; the greater end and design of afflictions, and which makes the method to be of absolute necessity: for God otherwise doth not *delight to grieve the children of men*. Be sure then let us here *hold fast that which is good*, for it is held out to us in the most sensible manner, and no state of man is so desperate and deplorable, as that of an incorrigible wretch.

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The *whole world lieth in wickedness*, saith St. John, 1. Ep. v. 19. 20. But *we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we might know him that is true.* And by virtue of this understanding and knowledge of God and his religion, we shall be enabled to discern rightly betwixt good and evil, and even out of the wickedness of the world, to make an easy extraction of that which is good.

Vicious examples are far more numerous in the world than those that are virtuous and good, but they may happily prove equal occasions of good; for as by the one we are incited to imitation, and the admiration of virtue and piety, so by the other may we be raised into a detestation and abhorrence of all vicious and ungodly practices.

From the very looks and behaviour of a sot, as from an example of mighty influence, we may learn sobriety and temperance: What a spectacle of abhorrence is a lewd debauched miscreant, that by his sins hath ruin'd his body and estate, and made himself a stench to all that come near him? What a foil must such a figure make to set off the beauty of soberness and chastity? When we see a man raving and reviling, weltering in passion and revenge, how like a savage doth he look? But how charming and enamouring will charity and good nature appear upon this sight? How graceful and glorious, and how delicately clean, will be the ornament of a meek spirit?

The haughty insults of pride, the ugliness of
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its aspect, the most observable frequency of its shameful downfalls, are so many lessons of instruction to make us survey and look into ourselves, and teach us, that humility and lowliness will put us into the possession of that glory and credit which pride affects and pursues, but takes the falsest, the most unlucky aim.

Rudeness and ill-manners must make us in love with good breeding, are an excellent incitement to courteous and obliging behaviour: As the sight of monsters and ill-shaped creatures, of mad-men and ideots, doth naturally raise us into a just admiration of symmetry, and into a due esteem and thankfulness for the blessings of reason and understanding, and all the happy endowments of body and mind. In the Scriptures we have many rules and examples (none to do evil that good may come) to make the best advantages of all the evil occurrences of our lives, and out of them to *hold fast* something that is *good*: Our Saviour bids us, if we are wise, to *make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*: Here we shall *hold fast* the greatest good, by freely *letting go* the paultry things of this world; a liberal distribution of them to charitable uses will purchase for us *everlasting habitations*.

The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* were a very ill sort of people, and their examples by no means to be followed, and yet good was to be got out of them; *They sit in Moses's seat*, says our Lord, *all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do*. Mat. xxiii. 2, 3. Their nauseous hy-

hypocrisy, and cheating impositions were a perfect recommendation of honesty, sincerity, and true piety. Their *making long prayers, and devouring widows houses*, must make us esteem and endeavour to imitate the zeal of those who are strict and devout in their worship, but then without maintain in their practice as well as opinion, the inseparable conjunction of morality with true religion: Throughout the fore-mentioned *chapter*, he set them forth in all their vile and odious colours; and tho' it was not his way or temper, to inveigh or be satirical, yet there he condescends to rip up and lay open all their villanies and secret designs, which by his all-perceiving eye, he saw twisted with all their holy pretences; and be sure no doctrines could be more seasonable and necessary than to expose their religious knaveries to the view of his followers, that they may loath and avoid them, and with greater zeal and strictness adhere to the *weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith*.

Hypocrisy cannot but be the aversion of all honest men, when the masks and vizards are taken off; and such an ugly sight cannot but make us in love with the beauty of holiness, and to do justice and honour to the profession of our faith, by all sincerity and integrity.

Evil opinions too as well as practices may prove productive of some good effects: *Heresies* are commonly accounted the worst of all evils. Yet they *must come*, says St. Paul, (1. Cor. xi.) *that they that are approved may be made manifest among you*: A most excellent
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purpose, for the approving and establishing orthodox doctrines, and the distinguishing true believers.

We owe our best Councils to *Heresies* : And to give but one instance under which most others of the like nature may be comprehended ; the *Arians* of former, and the *Socinians* of later ages, have maintained the most pestilent *Heresies*, destructive of the very essence of Christianity (for few comfortable remains of our religion, and poor hopes of our salvation, are left us when the Divinity and the satisfaction of the Son of God are exploded) but they have thereby alarmed and roused up the reason and learning of all sound believers, to make the most diligent search and enquiry into the foundation of those Catholick doctrines ; so that their errors stand not only condemned by the most orthodox Councils, but also confounded by the reasonings of the profoundest and most learned writers in the Christian world.

Here let us *hold fast that which is good*, the profession of a sound faith ; and let us farther shew forth the good effects of sound believing, by St. *James* his infallible *Criterion* of *good works*, and that will be an additional confutation of all gain-sayers, and a greater confirmation of our holy faith.

Thus *good* may become the result of all things. If we apply our judgment and resolution, Christian religion will shew us the method, and divine providence hath so ordered the affairs of the world, that *all things shall work together*
for

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for good to those that love God, and govern themselves in all things according to his laws.

But before I conclude, there is something more I must observe from the words; which is, that *holding fast that which is good*, must denote resolution and perseverance, to consummate all the happy effects of our Christian persuasion. The genuine product of a sound faith in all its articles (as I have observed already) is a virtuous and holy life, conformable to the dictates of that faith; and *trying and proving* must be for some substantial good, or else all religious enquiries must be very impertinent curiosity, and the vainest employment of our time, and cannot but prove a great aggravation of our guilt and condemnation.

Let us then *hold fast* this *summum bonum*, this chief good: Whatsoever is the result of our searchings and *provings*, tho' some doubts should remain, as to the determination of some matters, there cannot be the least scruple whether we should live well or not: Our labour and pains in enquiring, will be better employ'd in *well-doing*; there we cannot mistake. All the obligations and all the rules for good living are clear demonstration: The work indeed is laborious, and requires time and assiduity for the finishing of it; but no art or learning, no craft or cunning. And here in the equality of divine providence is manifested beyond all objection: The way of life and salvation lies fair and open to all men; and as our progress goes on, the difficulties will remit and lessen: but what is most encouraging
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of all, we may here be assured of the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit, without reserve, upon our prayers and our endeavours, not to guide us in all controversies, not to gratify us with an infallible determination in all debates and enquiries, but to direct us and assist us, *in holding fast* our everlasting good.

Which God of his infinite mercy grants us, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ; to whom Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God and three Persons, be ascribed, all Majesty and Adoration, now, and for ever. *Amen.*



S E R-

SERMON XIV.

Preached on *Asb-Wednesday*.

The Nature, Necessity, and Efficacy of cleansing Duties.

2. KINGS V. 3.

And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said ; My father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it ? How much rather then, when he saith to thee Wash and be clean ?

THERE is no man that is not a very great stranger to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but must be acquainted with the story of *Naaman the Syrian*, who is the subject of this whole chapter, and whom his servants very seasonably addressed in these words of my Text.

He was a great man and honourable, as you have his quality and character set forth ver. the 1st.

1st. and probably a very good and pious sort of man, of an heathen, and a soldier : because it is said, that by him *the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria*, and prospered his arms and conduct : *He was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.* His grandeur and all his triumphs were no doubt of it mightily eclipsed, as well as his enjoyments lessened by that foul and scandalous disease ; and perhaps he would have parted with any of his glories, to have been cleansed and cleared of his distemper. As we usually pronounce upon a condition, that is but low and inferiour comparatively, that it is yet comfortable and happy, when it is clean.

By good fortune, but when I say so, I mean by the especial designation of divine providence, there was in this great man's house a *Jewish* maid, lately brought away captive out of the land of *Israel* ; and she waited on Naaman's wife, and she said unto her mistress, *Would to God, my lord were with the Prophet that is in Samaria ; for he would recover him of his leprosy.* The hint was soon taken, and his royal master, the king of *Syria* himself, would lose no time or opportunity for the preservation of so brave a subject, therefore dispatches him away in all haste (*go to — go*) with a *letter*, and noble presents to the king of *Israel*.

But this king, who laid no claim to any such sovereign touch or stroak of healing, received this message with the greatest indignation, fell to *renting his cloaths*, which was an old *Jewish* way of venting passions, and shewing resentments

ments of anger or sorrow. He look'd upon it as a design'd affront, or a politick stratagem and occasion taken to ensnare him : *Am I God*, saith he, *to kill and make alive, that this man doth send to me to recover a man of his leprosy ? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.*

But when *Elisha* the man of God heard this news, both of the message and the king's resentments, he forthwith undertook the cure : *Let him come now to me ; and he shall know that there is a Prophet in Israel.* And so *Naaman* came with his horses and with his chariot in very great state and pomp, but yet stood at the door of the house of *Elisha* : The Prophet had but little regard to the Heathen's grandeur : He knew his business, and sent out a messenger with a prescription by word of mouth : *Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shall be clean.* But the great man, at this cold and slighting both reception and prescription, became very cholerick, and turn'd away in great fury. What would not a (little) Prophet of *Samaria* come out himself, to a man of his quality, the great general of *Syria* ? Would he not call upon the name of the Lord his God, and vouchsafe to strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper ? Were not other waters of as great virtue as those of *Israel* ? And were not some rivers in *Damascus* of better note than the little rivulet of *Jordan* ? why may not I wash in them and be clean ? So it is said he turn'd and went a-

way in a rage. But his servants less angry, and therefore more considering, and too much concerned for his recovery, to neglect such seasonable admonition even to so great a master, take the boldness to reprehend him in the words of the Text, in which better advice is also imply'd, *If the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?* No doubt, upon this rational conclusion, that a miraculous supernatural power would not fail in its operation, tho' the means be never so simple and unlikely to human apprehensions. Upon second thoughts he took their advice, and followed the Prophet's prescription, and soon found himself deceived into a cure, to his immediate comfort and happiness; tho' his distrust and suspicion had rendered him but an unworthy patient; as you read in the verse following the Text: *Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.* And a better cure was also wrought upon him at the same time, tho' not in such perfection; he became a convert from his *Ethnic* religion, only with this salvo and reserve, that he might be indulged in one *Pagan* act, of courtly hypocrisy, or occasional conformity, to qualify him for the keeping of his place, *to bow with his master in the house of Rimmon.* ver. 18.

If, go in peace, denotes a permission, as it probably may, the allowance must be ascribed to those times *liberi spiritus*, as they have been called,

called, of greater liberty or latitude of spirit under the law; but the purity of the gospel is so nice and delicate (if I may be allowed the expressions in the better sense) so very refined in all perfection, that as it stands in no need of, so it cannot ever dispense with, any sort of dissimulation or prevarication. I shall insist no longer upon the story, tho' every passage might administer very useful matter for farther discourse; but shall come to the words of the Text, and draw from them, or rather from the import of them, these doctrinal positions, suitable to this time of humiliation, in which we are more especially enjoined by the Christian church, to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, the epidemick leprosy and contagion of our mortal estate.

I. That true religion, which is the Christian, in all its duties and exercises, was designed for this great end and purpose to make and keep us clean.

II. That this Christian cleanness must be an entire purification of the whole man.

III. That tho' some particular Duties prescribed or enjoin'd for our cleanness, like *washing in the waters of Jordan* are easy and simple, yet are they by the divine institution and blessing of God, very effectual for our recovery out of our estate of uncleanness and natural pollution.

IV. That this cleanness is of absolute necessity and indispensable obligation, without which it is impossible to find acceptance with God here, or to be glorified hereafter.

I. That true religion is to make and keep us clean. Under this true religion we must comprehend the practice of all moral virtues; every one of which are of particular and necessary use for this purpose of making and keeping us clean: And the contrary vices have a certain leprous foulness, that is inseparable from their nature and practice.

Now Christianity, which indispensibly enjoins the practice of every moral virtue, and the use too of some positive commands (as the two Sacraments) and duties in order to cleanness, is this sovereign prescription that will clean us from all original corruptions, at least the malignity of them, and heal our diseases that we have contracted by our actual impurities and transgressions.

The *Jewish* religion, established by the same almighty power of working miracles as the Christian was, was altogether made up of typical and preparative prescriptions, for this moral and substantial cleanness of the whole man. Outward cleansings were more expressly commanded, but inward were more especially imply'd, and were then and are for ever obliging. Their circumcision was not only instituted to distinguish them from other nations, but also for purity sake, and a reason is given for it. Their
rules

rules for eating were very strict and severe (tho' one would think there need no laws to be cleanly in feeding) that they should carefully abstain from every thing that was in its nature unclean or declared to be such. Many laws too they had relating to this foul disease of leprosy (a distemper very, very incident to *Jewish* constitutions) to keep those that were infected at a distance, not to be admitted into society without great and various purgations.

Their rules of decency and order relating to their tabernacle, and after to their temple, to their priests, to their offices and ornaments, to person or place, or whatever was set a part to sacred uses, were all injunctions for the nicest and most exact purity and cleanness: as their sacrifices and oblations of all sorts were instituted for cleansing and purgation, as well as for expiation and atonement. This you may see at large in the compass of one chapter, *Levit. xvi.* where, in every act and circumstance of their worship, Cleanness is their most punctual charge and injunction, *viz.* Cleanness in the holy linen, in the coat and the mitre, and all vestments with which the high-priest was to be attired, when he entered into the holy place: And his own flesh, tho' his person was never so sacred from his function, must be washed in water before he put them on, ver. 4. Then he began with the *sin-offering* for the *atonement and cleansing of himself and his house.* Next he took a censer full of burning coals, upon which he strewed the incense, which was for

farther purgation, as well as a sweet favour. After that he proceeds to the sin-offering for the people, to make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins, ver. 16 and 19. he shall sprinkle of the blood of both the sacrifices upon the altar seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel: So that purification and sanctification are here inseparable, or one and the same act. And it is enjoined likewise that the fit-man, as he is called, ver. 21. that hath let go the scape-goat, with their iniquities upon his head into the wilderness, or a land not inhabited, shall wash his clothes and bath his flesh in water, before he be admitted into the camp, ver. 26. so must he do too that burneth the refuse of the sin-offering without the camp, ver. 28. and lastly, ver. 29 and 30. it was made a statute for ever, when they were to afflict their souls upon the anniversary of expiations, that on that day the priest should make an atonement for them to cleanse them, that they may be clean from all their sins before the Lord.

Thus as short as possible, in such variety of ritual expiations and purgations, of which the *Jewish* religion chiefly consisted, I have endeavoured to shew you, that the injunction for Cleanness was ever annexed to all their legal observations; And be sure then this was to dispose and discipline them to moral or virtuous cleanness; as purity in life and conversation, was

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ultimately the great purpose of their whole law.

So that those numerous sacrifices prescribed by it, are not more express types of that one all sufficient sacrifice by the blood of Jesus Christ, than those legal cleannesses, and most strict prohibitions to abstain or keep a distance from all things that were unclean or polluted, do adumbrate and typify the purity of that religion that Christ came to establish, or that law he came to fulfill. And even that one all sufficient sacrifice of infinite value, that was the great propitiation for the sins of the whole world, was offered also for our purgation and cleansing; so St. *John* tells us in relation to both: *The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin*, 1. *Ep.* 1. 7. and chap. ii. ver. 2.

Now the *Jews* most absurdly and stupidly spent all their whole time, and run out all their religion and devotion in these *outside cleansings*; for which gross superstition they were often reprehended by their Prophets, as they were for their sacrifices (tho' commanded) without moral obedience: who took occasion too from these legal cleansings, to press upon them that inward purity that was chiefly designed, and more acceptable to God; and to decry all foul and unrighteous acts, which were far more criminal, than any unclean miscarriages or oversights relating to their ritual observances. So *Isaiah* calls upon them for more cleanly doings, in his 1st chapter; where he is so vehement against their numerous, their officious, and nau-

seous sacrifices and other ceremonies; because they were not accompanied with the more acceptable service of holy living, *ver. 16 and 17. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge (for) the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

These are the proper acts of a religion of purity and cleanness: The very same which St. James describes chap. i. *ver. ult. Pure religion and undefiled before God, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.*

The same evangelical Prophet in a vision of the Lord of hosts in his glory, falls into an ecstasy of horror, upon the apprehension of his own and the people's uncleanness, chap. vi. *ver. 5. Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.* It was moral cleanness that entitled them to all the blessings of heaven; and to be restored to grace and favour, was, to be delivered from their uncleanness: So *Jer. xxxiii. 7, 8.* when God promises Israel a gracious return out of captivity, he tells the Prophet, *I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me:* And the like favours and graces are expressed, *Ezek. xxxix. 29.* when the Lord promises to save them from all their uncleanness.

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Holy David is therefore so earnest in his prayers and so frequent in that petition, that God would *create in him a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him*, Psal. li. 10. because without cleanness no accesses could be made to him, nor any blessings expected from him: *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lift up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully: He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation*, Psal. xxiv. 3, 4, 5. so before, Psal. xviii. 20. when he recounts with thankfulness the blessings and deliverances he had received from God, he said, *The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompens'd me*: Cleanness, *i. e.* clean and righteous doings were ever the qualifications for God's especial favours. *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart*, Psal. lxxiii. 1.

As filthiness in body, and in the common way of living, doth naturally produce foul diseases, and is commonly the source from whence even plague and pestilence often-times arise; so in the course of providence, the uncleanness of their conversations, the foulness of their actions, brought down the judgments of God upon them, threw them out of his care and protection, who is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, or to have any regard to those, who like the foulest and most brutal of all beasts wallow in their own filthiness. Sin deserves no better a name than

than that of the greatest stench and corruption, and could we look deeper into its nature, nothing would be more loathsome to the embraces of rational creatures that are able to judge and distinguish. And we cannot pronounce greater or higher of any action, that is honest and honourable, that is genuine and generous, (no ways selfish or fordid) nay, that is religious and conscientious, than that it is done *clean and fair*: and then King *David* hath given the completest character of true religion and its true and lasting enjoyments, Psal. xix. 9. *The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever.*

Thus under the *Jewish* œconomy, the strictest *cleanness* was ever enjoin'd in all their positive rites: but it was moral or virtuous purity that was the great purpose and termination of all that ceremonial niceness, according to the construction of their prophets and teachers, who were inspired of God. And the whole had a visible tendency to that perfection of cleanness, which is the accomplishment of the law and the prophets; and is the grand prescription that is indispensibly annexed to every precept and duty of the Christian constitution; which we cannot call by a more significant and comprehensive, as well as creditable and glorious name, than a religion of purity to make and keep us *clean*.

As the blood of the Son of God is said to *cleanse us from all our sins*, so his precepts of purity and holiness are to preserve and keep us in that clean condition; otherwise his blood must necessarily fail of that miraculous operation; and,

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we may as positively pronounce will prove as ineffectual for our cure, as our *Syrian* Captain rashly pronounced upon the waters of *Jordan* as insufficient for his cleansing.

In God's holy word are contain'd all the rules for the most refined purity; *Now are ye clean*, says our Saviour, *through the word which I have spoken unto you*: And says holy *David*, *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes*: the Scriptures, if we fairly apply ourselves to them, will clear our understandings and wills of all corrupt prejudices and prepossessions, and make us judge and act according to truth and sincerity.

The *Pharisees*, by their loose and corrupt glosses and comments, had cast a great deal of sullage even amongst the precepts of their moral law; our Lord severely reprimands them for this unfair dealing, and makes his amendments and corrections in that 5th Chap. of *St. Mat.* Gospel, where you will see he reduces every precept, which they had so sullied by their loose expositions, to the greatest and most genuine cleanness.

Adultery and *Fornication* are very foul sins in the fact; no *Pharisees* could deny it: yes, and so they are without the fact, when the scene of them is display'd in the heart, when they lye brooding in the imaginations, when we indulge and please ourselves with all filthy thoughts, which cannot or must not be produced into act, or make publick appearance, for want of opportunity, or for fear of shame or some present punishment; whilst the eyes sparkle and flame with lust;

lust, and betray the filthy desires and inclinations of the brutal soul. This is the decision of the point, from the Christian, and indeed the true moral law against all impurities, *ver. 28. Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* So in respect to all other obedience, or forbearance, all is nauseous formality or worse, whilst the heart cherisheth and fomenteth the malignity. In relation to their love and hatred, their friends or enemies, if they would rightly observe the moral law, they must be fair and honest, generous and merciful; their righteousness must be *clear and clean*, and all of a piece, that they may be truly (as they ever pretended to the title) *Israelites* indeed, the children of their father which is in heaven, who is ever both merciful and just in all the various dispensations of his providence.

In a word, the image of God, which we have so much defaced in ourselves, we can in no wise recover but by the purity of our minds; in which the likeness and resemblance must consist. Purity is his nature and essence, it is diffus'd thro' all his attributes, and is visible, bright and shining in all his laws; in all the actings of his almighty power and providence, throughout the creation and government of the universe. Nothing can we rationally know or conceive of him, but what is pure; and we can in no degree come up to that rule of purity and perfection, which concludes these precepts of reformation in the fore-mentioned chapter, but by *purifying ourselves*

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as he is pure, which comes nearest to divine perfection, Mat. v. 48. *Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* So shall we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Which brings me to the second proposition I laid down, viz.

II. That Christian cleanness must be an entire purification of the whole man. We must be clean all over and throughout: if there be any filthiness and pollution in the inner-man, in the affections and inclinations of the heart, in any faculties and dispositions of the soul, that lies latent and unregarded, it will stench and putrify the more; like foulness in any common vessel, tho' the outside be never so bright and shining. Under this simile or parable of *cleaning the outside* of their utensils, and leaving all their filth *within*, was the baseness of the *Pharisees*, their extortion and excess, their ravening and wickedness, so justly expos'd and condemn'd by our Saviour, Mat. xxiii. 25. Luke xi. 39. as the vilest and most nauseous hypocrisy and uncleanness, most odious and provoking in the sight of God, and the esteem of all good men. Not but outward cleanness, as it is decent and shews respect, ought to be observ'd, more especially in all acts and modes of religious worship. But outward cleanness alone in them was a perfect cheat, a mere trick and design to devour and destroy, to put in execution the villany of their wicked minds, under the specious appearance of promoting

moting the cause of God, and the good of their neighbours; whilst *Publicans* and sinners that were thought to be foul all-over, and made no pretences to much cleanness, were found upon proof to be the honefter hearted men, and more fair in their dealings; as also better qualified for the kingdom of God. We are indeed all apt to mistake in this matter: Cleansing the whole man is the most laborious work of religion, and we are apt to do it by halves, or very superficially; severe and impartial mortifications must be applied, or else our lusts will get the upper hand of us and we shall be soon over-spread with the leperous filthiness of flesh and spirit. At least some one lust may get into favour, and be indulg'd in freedom and wantonness, whilst we carry a fair face of religion, and as we are apt to think of great cleanness in respect to others.

We cannot single out a more proper virtue for this cleansing work than that of *temperance*, but then we must keep to the most extensive practice of it; if we hope for the mastery of our lusts, we must be *temperate in all things*. If we take it in that restrained sense (relating to the duty now enjoind us by the Church) in governing our appetites by *fasting*, and abstaining from what may pamper us up into sensual lusts and forgetfulness, it is of the most excellent use to make our condition clean and comfortable, and the practice of religion free and easy.

For an habitual temperance of this nature keeps our souls and bodies in the most happy conjunction, in the most pleasing union one with another,

another; our enjoyments will be clear and clean and undisturbed. Whereas the opposite vice of intemperance is not only attended with a sensible and visible foulness in the practice, but brings the greatest disorder and disquietude to our lives: The enjoyments it ravens after are, at best, but gross and brutal; and the interruptions are frequent and usually very grievous, and melancholick and pensive: it is indeed a force and violence upon our natures, which would hold out longer, and have truer satisfaction in an habitual moderation. Innumerable are the scandalous and calamitous attendants and consequents of this sort of intemperance, too foul to be display'd and laid open in this place.

But temperance must not be confin'd to moderate eating and drinking only. The *Pharisees* were ever acknowledged to be masters of so much of it; and yet at the same time *devourers*, with a vengeance, of *widows houses* and such like morsels. And many very ill men do keep up to the strict practice of it, as a virtue of great advantage in many respects, and of great use (as a clean covering) to lay over other foul vices, and keep them secret from the world, that are quite out as unclean, and as directly contrary to our Christian temperance, as the dissolute and barefac'd intemperance I last mentioned.

So that this is but a partial, and indeed a mere outside cleanness, if covetousness and ambition, and malice, and ill-nature, and such like inordinate lusts and desires, are indulged within; when-

whenever they break forth into action, as they are ever ready to do upon occasion; then judge, I pray you, without prejudice or partiality, which of the sorts look with the foulest aspect. Sordidness and selfishness, greediness of gain and oppression, deceiving and lying, bribery and perjury, which are the usual effects of avarice; and so likewise insolence and haughtiness, pride and arrogance, reviling and detracting, and whatsoever else is the behaviour of ambitious and malicious men; when we see them upon the stage of action, we cannot but pronounce upon them as the basest and vilest practices. No lewdness, no debauchery upon earth can match these enormities, and could we look into the heart, there we should find the source and fountain of these to be as filthily mudded as that of the others, which are so foul to the outward view; and when they come out from thence, who can distinguish which are cleanest? They are all one off-spring, and our Saviour hath cast them together: Mark vii. 20. and following verses, *That, saith he, which cometh out of the man defileth the man: for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceits, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man.* If our devotion be right and sincere, we have this day pronounced an hearty curse upon those that commit such sins: let us heartily renounce and abjure them all the days of our life.

Says

Says our great prophet, *the man of God*, in this story (who was able to inflict as well as cure a disease) to *Gehazi* his servant: *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and to thy seed for ever*: a very equitable denunciation and curse, and most suitable to the foulness of his crime: The sly villain thought to have out-fac'd his master with a very idle excuse, when he had been posting after the rich *Syrian* commander for a reward for himself with a lye in his mouth, that his master had sent after him for some of the presents that before had been refused (whereas physicians take no fees who heal by a miraculous power) and then with another lye would have cheated the prophet, as he had done his patient: *Thy servant went no whither*.

You may see by this instance, how foul all unrighteous and falsifying dealing is, especially when acted by a servant, a disciple of a man of God, a professor of religion: *Naaman* the heathen is cured, and the demure varlet that waited on the prophet gets the inheritance of his foul disease.

Thus we cannot but have heard of some pretenders to saintship, who have look'd to outward view as precise and harmless as *Gehazi*, and have been shy of open and scandalous lewdness; yet have been fordid imitators in the foulest and most horrid practices of much the same kind. But we must take notice that the strictest profession of religion as to outward appearance, the practice of many excellent virtues, nay, the high pretences to justice or equity, defending the cause

of God, or maintaining the publick good, can never sanctify or make clean one dishonest or vicious act.

Temperance and abstinence from sensual pleasures, must be accompanied with temperance and abstinence from all unrighteous dealings, from base and fordid actions. When St. *Paul* says, *Let no man go beyond or defraud his brother*, he gives this as a reason, *for we are not called unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.* 1 *Thes.* iv. 6, 7. Let us then set ourselves to this *cleansing* work: cleanness is most easy and genuine to our natures, we are best pleas'd, most chearful and lively, when we are most clean. In all relations filthiness and corruption are a diminution of our happiness, or rather a burden and load of filth upon it, do mightily lessen our enjoyments in all that belongs unto us.

There is neither splendor nor satisfaction in riches or honour, without cleanness: the richest attire, the noblest furniture, the most sumptuous entertainments, are under-valued and disparaged, if they want that less chargeable addition of being clean: how much greater must be both the satisfaction and the glory, to be clean in all our thoughts and actions!

Let us begin with our hearts, and root out from thence all unclean imaginations: *Keep thy heart*, says the wiseman *Prov.* iv. 23. *with all diligence*, or above all keeping; *for out of it are the issues of life.*

There are habits of thinking as well as of acting; let us endeavour to break ourselves of those

those that are foul and polluted ; and so accustom ourselves to a clean, to a rational and wise way of thinking ; and Use will make it very delightful. There is infinite scope for holy meditation, as vast and extensive as is thought itself : St. Paul hath set our thoughts a large task. *Phil. iv. 8. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest (or venerable) whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise ; think on these things ;* that is project, ponder and think upon them, in order to practice. If we could so happily change the whole scene of our vain and unclean imaginations and roving thoughts, we should find to our greater satisfaction and contentment, there would flow from thence into our words and actions, as many good things as we just now, from our Saviour, reckon'd up bad ones ; which proceed out of a polluted heart and so much defile the man.

Reforming of hearts is indeed a very difficult work, because the change must be so great and entire : we must therefore make our earnest application to God for his extraordinary grace and assistance ; holy *David* calls out for a new creation : *Create in me a new heart*, as tho' the old one had been so rotten and corrupt, that it could never be clean'd or mended.

Our Christian state requires a new birth ; an entire change, from a state of sin and corruption to a state of purity and holiness. Christ gave himself for us to this end, to redeem us
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from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, Tit. ii. 14. All our vicious habits both of thinking and acting must be utterly extirpated and destroyed; and, according to St. Paul's doctrine, Ephes. iv. we must put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of our minds; and so put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness; And that we might have almighty assistance in this Cleansing work, let us never cease to pray, as we have begun this day in our office of commination, out of the 51st Ps. Have mercy on us, O God, after thy great goodness, according to the multitude of thy mercies, do away our offences; wash us thoroughly from our wickedness; and cleanse us from our sin: Turn thy face from our sins, and put out all our misdeeds. Make us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us: cast us not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from us.

I should now pass to the other two doctrinal positions, which I at first laid down, but I find they will make me exceed my time, and therefore must refer them to another opportunity.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed, all Majesty, Might and Adoration, now, and for ever more. *Amen.*

S E R-

SERMON XV.

Preached in L E N T.

The Nature, Necessity, and Efficacy of cleansing Duties.

2 KINGS V. 3.

And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said ; My father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it ? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean ?

I HAVE already laid before you the story of *Naaman the Syrian*, and made such observations and deductions from the several passages of it, as I thought instructive, and worthy of our consideration. The grand mistake of this great man consisted in this, tho' he was easily enough persuaded, even by the suggestion and advice of a little servant maid, (ver. 2.) to take a long journey, and make ap-

plication to a certain prophet, *a man of God*, for the cure of his distemper (who, he could not but suppose must heal by a super-natural power) and yet when he came to him, to distrust his prescription, and *turn away in a fury*, because the means and operation were simple and easy, and very unlike to produce the effects of natural causes; which was such a gross absurdity, and such a contradiction to the nature of a miracle, that his servants could not forbear, tho' not their proper office, giving him better council and instruction, and in a gentle manner upbraiding him in the words of the Text: *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?* Which advice, upon second thoughts, he was so wise to take, and so was happily (tho' hardly) persuaded into a perfect cure, by following the prescription of a *man of God*; although his diffidence and reluctance might very justly have obstructed the operation.

I have already made application of the words, and the purport of them, to the obligations that lye upon us, of observing the rules and injunctions of moral purity and cleanness, which in the height and most refined perfection are required through the whole Christian religion. The doctrines and duties of the gospel, more especially those that relate to purgation and purity, to expiation and atonement, are typified and adumbrated not only from legal observances, but also from many historical passages of the *Old Testament*. I have accordingly laid down these doctrinal

doctrinal positions in order to the *cleansing* of ourselves from all *filthiness of the flesh and spirit*, the epidemick leprosy and contagion of our mortal estate.

I. That true religion, which is the Christian, in all its duties and exercises, was designed for this great end and purpose, to make and keep us clean.

II. That this Christian cleanness must be an entire purification of the whole man.

III. That tho' some particular Duties prescribed or enjoined for our cleanness, like *washing in the waters of Jordan*, are easy and simple, yet are they, by the divine institution and blessing of God, very effectual for our recovery out of our estate of uncleanness and natural pollution.

IV. That this cleanness is of absolute necessity and indispensable obligation, without which it is impossible to find acceptance with God here, or to be glorified hereafter.

Upon the two first I have discoursed already, and will trouble you with no manner of repetition of what hath been said, without presuming to say, it may be remembered at this distance of time; and shall therefore pass to the third general head, *viz.*

III. That tho' some particular duties prescribed and enjoined for our cleanness, like *washing in the waters of Jordan*, are easy and simple, yet are they, by the divine institution and blessing of God, very effectual for our recovery out of our estate of uncleanness and natural pollution.

Inward purity and holiness is the great end and design not only of all ritual observances, but indeed of the whole law and gospel; the ceremonies of the former, were to typify it; the moral precepts of both carried it home to the heart, to the entire clearing and purifying our whole conversations.

Now to the numerous Levitical rites, which were for purification as well as atonement, *two* only were thought sufficient and necessary to succeed under the Christian dispensation: *Cleansing* here was to pierce deeper than to the outward man; and it was time the ceremonies that had been instituted for that purpose, should cease and pass into substance; especially when they began to trust in them, and to think them sufficient without inward and moral purity.

These two Christian rites are the *holy Sacraments*, of the most healing and cleansing operation, as we ought to conclude from the solemn institution of them by our Lord, and the indispensable obligation upon us to receive them. As to the

FIRST, *Water* from the beginning of the world hath been look'd upon as a symbol of purity: both its nature and uses are to denote and produce cleanness. Now our entrance into the co-
venant

covenant of grace, and into all the privileges and advantages thereof, is by water in our *Baptism*, which can signify no less than that purity of heart and life, is the indispensable qualification of a Christian professor : It is therefore called our *regeneration* or *new birth* : We must be *born of water and of the Holy Ghost*, or we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, says our Saviour ; (*Jo. iii. 5.*) for it is he himself that hath saved us according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, says St. Paul, *Tit. iii. 5.* And St. Peter to exalt the ordinance and virtue of Baptism, makes a reference of it as far back as *Noah's flood* ; when few, that is, *eight persons were saved by water* ; the like figure whereunto even *Baptism doth also save us*. Where Baptism is the antitype to the ark, wherein those persons were saved *ὁ ὕατος*, *per aquam*, * *cum in aquis versarentur*, when they were in the waters, as *Grotius* expounds that Text.

We have a typical resemblance too of this new birth in the history before us : When the miraculous cure was wrought upon *Naaman*, by dipping himself seven times in *Jordan*, his flesh is said to come again, like the flesh of a young child : Which most expressly represents the new birth in our baptism : *Children* are set forth as our patterns of purity, for of such is the kingdom of God : Our Lord hath exhorted all men to follow their innocency ; and hath declared that *whosoever shall not receive the king-*

* 1. Pet. iii. 21. vide Grot. in Loc. *Sci* per in pro, &c

kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

This was a signal consecration of water, and of that particular river, by a great Prophet, *a man of God*: which were both consecrated to a higher and more excellent use, by the Baptism of the Son of God; as we commemorate the same in our office of *Publick Baptism*, in our first prayer, we beseech Almighty God, that *as by the baptism of his well beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in the river of Jordan, did sanctify water to the mystical washing away of sin, so he would for his infinite mercies, mercifully look upon the child* (that is to be baptised) *and wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost, &c.* And thus doth baptism represent unto us our profession, which is,

1st. A preparative purity; — by which we must be admitted into the privileges of the gospel; that we may draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having *our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*: as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* expresses it *chap. x. ver. 22.* And

2^{dly}. An habitual purity, both of mind and body, in our inward thoughts and our outward actions; visibly carried through the whole course of our lives, by which we shall *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* (2. Cor. vii. 1.

SECONDLY, The *holy sacrament* of the body and blood of our blessed Lord, was instituted
for

for our farther refinement, and for our establishment in this habitual purity of heart and life. The original sacrifice which is here represented, was for cleansing as well as expiation: *The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth us from all sin*, saith St. John, *Ep. i. chap. i. 7.* and chap. ii. ver. 2. *And if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* As the Apostle argues, in the Epistle to the Heb. ix. 13. 14. and accordingly we pray in our Liturgy, before the consecration of the elements; that our gracious Lord *would grant us so to eat the flesh of his dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood.* And here then the kindest and most grateful reception we can give our Saviour, must be in the purity of our lives: All preparatives are formal and nauseous, which are not attended with this cleanness of heart and conversation; as we ourselves ever pronounce that to be the most desirable entertainment and welcome, which is hearty and clean, tho' it have the less of pomp and ceremonious professions.

We must then make ready our hearts; we must always have those mansions *swept and garnished*, where Christ Jesus and his Holy Spirit are

are to make their entrance and abode. When we are thus clean and honest-hearted, we are at all times prepared, and fit to be admitted as worthy communicants to that holy table. The master of the feast, who himself is both meat and drink, is also a God who *searcheth the heart, and tryeth the reins*, and therefore we must be clean throughout. All the moral precepts of the gospel (the practice of which are ever to attend these two positive and ritual ordinances, and then they will be of mighty operation) are in every single instance prescribed in this cleansing work : And in the holy Scriptures are contained all the rules for the most refined purity, as hath been observed already : *Now are you clean*, says our Lord, *thro' the word which I have spoken unto you.*

Thus, as in my former discourse I gave an account of the typifying cleansings of the *Levitical* law ; so here I thought proper to lay before you the nature, and institution, of these *two* Christian rites substituted in their room, and constituted as the restoratives and preservatives of our spiritual life : And so now am to account for the virtues of them.

Now would it not have been the most unaccountable, the most absurd obstinacy in *Naaman* the *Syrian*, (had he continued in it) to make such a troublesome journey to find out a man of God, that is, one that could do miracles, and particularly do wonderful cures ; by being so nearly related to an Almighty divine power (a Prophet, *a man of God* ; he apply'd himself to him

him upon that esteem and information) and yet after all to distrust and dispute the efficacy of that power, because he prescribed so simple and insipid a thing, as the waters of *Jordan*, to cleanse a man of so foul a disease, as seem'd to be inbred and ingrafted into his very nature and constitution, and had baffled the skill of the best physicians, and all the virtues of more probable means? This was not to own him as a man of God, but to slight him as an ordinary quack and pretender : For if he was able to work miracles, *i. e.* do things above the operation of natural means and powers, then whatsoever was prescribed must effect the cure.

But thus a foolish abject Sectary among us shall argue ; What good can washing or sprinkling with water do to an infant ? And thus a *Socinian*, who pretends to an higher strain of reason ; What virtue can there be in water, or in bread and wine, that can reach to the cleansing of the soul ? and so maintains the Sacraments to be insignificant rites, or only for distinction, and their obligation now wholly to cease. Nay, and thus some despisers amongst ourselves, who would seem to be otherwise in our esteem, and are strangers to, or would not be thought to have espoused the tenets of the fore-mentioned Sectaries or Hereticks, do yet stubbornly reject, and resolve to continue to do so to the end of their days, the sacrament of the *Lord's-supper* ; not affrighted with St. *Paul's* damnation, rather slighting it, but out of perfect slight and despection to the ordinance, as what may as well be

be let alone, and their claims and pretences to Christianity no ways infringed or diminished.

Now all these do pretend (and it is only pretence) to believe the gospel, and to acknowledge the truth of those miracles, which Christ wrought for the confirmation of all the doctrines and precepts thereof: And amongst these are the solemn institution and injunction of these holy Ordinances. Now was he not as able to annex virtue or grace, and efficacy to them, as to perform any the least miracle that he wrought? and to ordain, that to the end of the world, they should accrue to the benefit of all those that are qualified for the receiving of them?

If God undertakes to cleanse our hearts; to question the means, however unlikely in our weak judgments (it is enough they shall not be ill ones) is to deny his power, and that is, in effect to deny his being. He that first drop'd down virtue into every plant and mineral, or whatever is medicinal; can certainly convey as sovereign virtue for the comforts of the soul into *water*, or *bread* and *wine*, consecrated according to his own institution.

Common clay, tho' temper'd with spittle, may, upon common apprehensions, be thought more likely to put out than clear the eye-sight; yet, by the application of an Almighty sovereign healer, was it effectual for the restoring to his sight a man that was blind from his birth: For the completing of which cure, he was farther ordered to go wash in the pool *Siloam* (of per-
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haps as little natural virtue as the waters of *Jordan*) and he went his way therefore, *and washed, and came seeing*, Jo. ix.

When God puts his stamp and impress upon ordinary means, they become of the most extraordinary and sovereign efficacy : To distrust them, is to disbelieve his power ; and for Christians to do so, is to question the whole revelation : He needeth not wait the tedious influences and slow operations of natural causes ; whatever comes first to hand (as we may say) is a sufficient instrument and proper expedient in his hands, to effect whatsoever he willeth or would bring to pass.

Our Lord was seriously employed, and in a work that did notify an injunction of the strictest purity and cleanness, when he set himself to *wash his Disciples feet*, Jo. xiii. He put not himself upon so mean an office for the sake of outward cleanness : But the solemnity of the whole operation, was to set forth the obligations they lay under, both to purify themselves, and to be ready to do all the kindest offices, tho' servile ones, one towards another, especially such as more immediately related to the good of their souls. It is said ver. 4. *he riseth from supper and laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself, and poured out water into a bason, and began to wash his Disciples feet, and wipe them with the towel with which he was girded* : Which no doubt rais'd them into high admiration at the solemnity of the work : St. Peter, in good manners, would by no means admit.

mit of it, 'twas too great a condescension; but when he perceived his Lord laid so much weight and stress upon it, and said, *If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me*: Then he cry'd out; *Lord! not my feet only, but my hands and my head*; all over by such sacred hands; great virtue must come from them, when so much came from the very hem of his garment as cur'd many foul diseases: But Jesus answered, *He that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit*, Mat. ix. 23. xiv. 36. plainly notifying, that this was but a ceremonious act: 1st. To give a testimony of humility and charity in all condescending offices of serving one another, from his own example, ver. 15. *I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you*: And 2^{dly}, The act itself, tho' ceremonious, and unsufficient in itself for inward cleansing, was to set forth our obligations to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*, and to the utmost of our endeavours, contribute to the reformation and clearing of our fellow brethren, that are in a state of sin and corruption. But the main inference I am to make from this relation is, that tho' some particular acts and duties, means and offices, for the advancement of purity and holiness, may seem ordinary, and unlikely to the eye of man, yet by the appointment of God may be raised to an excellent and supernatural use and virtue: Which shews the great power and wisdom of the Lord of all things; that he is no way straitened in bringing about his purposes

poses and designs, but can by the most ordinary means and methods, convey his most useful and transcendent blessings.

Thus, as the Apostle expresses it upon another occasion, hath God *chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and all things which are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are,* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. The occasion of which words, you have in the two preceding verses, *because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.* In truth the first planters, and the first receivers of the gospel, were people of very inconsiderable note; but was not the power of God the more illustrious, that they could thereby bear up against all the wisdom, all the philosophy and politicks of the world? And what indeed was the gospel but Christ crucified; as you read again in the two verses before the last mentioned: *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* It is out of the power of mortal man, and indeed of all the powers in the world, to found a kingdom upon the lowness and meanness, the scandal and

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purity and sanctification necessarily required of us, both to dispose us for those sublime and heavenly exercises, and to capacitate us for the beatific vision; which is infinite and everlasting bliss and glory, and for which an *impure* spirit must be utterly inapt and unqualified. St. Paul speaks of *a conversation in heaven*, a certain initiation here upon earth, into that we shall live hereafter, *from whence*, says he, *Phil. iii. 20, 21. we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.* This heavenly conversation upon earth, is that preparative state of purity and holiness that is to qualify us for, and entitle us to, that higher station of glory and happiness, the purchase of Christ Jesus; who, having all power given unto him in heaven and upon earth, can alone by his omnipotency effect this happy change or transformation. Upon this consideration, have some pronounced so hard upon a death-bed repentance, as what, if effectual, must be by extraordinary assistances of God's grace; and, if accepted, by as great allowances of his mercy. Because the penitent must be supposed to pass from a vicious, impure estate of life, without any intervening acts of purity and holiness, into an heavenly serenity, the purest society of Saints and Angels, and the immediate presence of God.

It is true, *the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin*: There are no limits to its infinite and bound-

boundless virtue, and the benefit cannot be denied at any time to a true penitent. The Thief on the cross in *articulo mortis*, in the very instant of expiring, was assured of it: The all-healing blood was then shedding forth, and he was near to the virtue and operation; and a miraculous cure and salvation of a desperate soul was to consummate those numerous ones that he had wrought upon bodies, whilst he walked upon earth. But extraordinary instances, and extraordinary means are not to be rely'd upon, nor are sufficient authority for our faith, without great presumption, and very frequent danger of failing. The ordinary course, and indeed that which we can with safety and by promises trust to, must be an actual purity and habitual sanctity of life, *before we go hence and be no more seen*: Nicodemus his interrogatory, (*how can a man be born again when he is old?*) was his ignorance of the nature of a spiritual birth, such a regeneration as is to be effected by the spirit of God, and to be forthwith manifested in newness of life; but here in relation to a death-bed repentance, the change and transition is more unconceivable, from a very impure filthy estate, to pass through the foulness of a mortal distemper, and the gates and groans of death, into the most refined immortality, to shine as the righteous shall, *like the firmament, or as the stars for ever and ever*. The Apostle St. Paul, even when he is proving the resurrection of the body, tells us that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incor-*

ruption: If our bodies be laid down in filthiness, in the habits of sin and corruption, *somno vinoque sepulta* (to use the words of the Poet in the dead and most literal sense) from an estate of supineness and debauchery, they can never rise in glory. There is no cleansing in the grave, the earth is no refining element; Our cleansing work must be all over, before our dissolution.

The same Apostle on the same subject, 1 Cor. xv. 29. urges an argument with an interrogation, which always casts the absurdity on those that do not acknowledge it conclusive: *Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptised for the dead?* The Text * hath ever been thought abstruse and mystical; but whether that customary practice was a vicarious baptism for a deceased friend or relation, or a personal one, upon the prospect or reproach of death, when given over, as we say, or taken for dead; or a solemn washing of the expired body, is not very material to be decided. The argument was of unanswerable force upon those that so strictly used and enjoyn'd such a ceremonious rite; because it was a well-known and received opinion amongst them, that they did it with a respect to a happy and bright resurrection. But the practice must be most absurd and unaccountable, if it did not symbolically denote the absolute necessity of precedent purifications, both of soul and body, in order to this advancement of both to the resurrection of the just, to glory and immortality. But

* *Vid. Est. in Loc.*

But we must more early engage in this laborious work of purifying ourselves ; what such a ceremony denotes, must in reality be the persevering practice of our whole lives : We are all over so corrupted, that it will take up much time as well as pains to make ourselves clean : Our purity must be permanent, and hold its integrity and sincerity through all temptations. For when our hearts are languishing, expiring and beating their last, when our appetites and inclinations are, in the natural and common sense, mortified, as 'twere deadened and perished, and all objects have lost their inviting allurements ; it is no wonder, nor at all thank-worthy, that vain thoughts and imaginations, filthy lusts and desires, should make their exit and vanish ; that malice, ambition, and covetousness, should remit their vigour and rancour, and let fall all prosecution of their designs. That there should be some faint appearances and little glimmering symptoms of charity, humility and good nature : Alas ! it is but what we call a lightening before death.

What purity of heart can there be, when no filth or guilt all this while hath been removed or clear'd away ? as *death leaves us, so judgment will find us : Corruption can never inherit incorruption* ; the impurities we carry out of this world will stick by us for ever.

To conclude : Christianity is a religion of the most refined purity and sanctity ; the exaltation of morality to the highest strains of virtuous, that is, clean and holy living ; the most refined

reformation and amendment, or completion of the preceding revelation by *Moses* and the *Prophets*. Christ came *to fullfil the law*, to reduce shadows to substance; all the commandments of the law to their native purity and intrinsic obligation, that he might not be put off with slight and superficial observances, whilst sincerity and integrity, honesty and justice, faith, mercy, and truth, all the natural issue of a pure heart and conscience, are wholly disregarded.

His own example we cannot set forth by a more shining character than by calling it, what it really and illustriously was, a life of the most refined purity; our redemption is founded in it: his infinite merits arise from his infinite purity. *Ye know*, says St. Peter 1 Ep. i. 18, 19. *ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.* And to this end, saith St. Paul, Tit. ii. 14, *Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.* In a word, the purity of his gospel, the purity of his example, the purity of his immaculate redemption, can be of no comfort or benefit at all to us, but the greater aggravation of our guilt and damnation, if we do not answer the conditions of this covenant of grace, by the purity of our own hearts and conversations.

Let us then, without *Naaman's* reluctance, or any diffidence, follow all the rules and prescriptions

scriptions of the holy Jesus the great *physician of our souls*, the *man of God*, the truly God and man, infinitely superior to all the men of God; with the most punctual observance of his word and ordinances, as they have been laid down in this and my former *Discourse*: then will he most certainly heal all our diseases, and cleanse us from all our sins and impurities: But let us with- all be ever calling out with holy *David* for almighty assistance to our own endeavours; that *God would create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us*; that he would not *cast us away from his presence*, nor *take his holy spirit from us*; which we beg for Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God and three persons be ascribed, all Honour, Might, Majesty and Dominion, now and for ever more. *Amen.*



SERMON XVI.

Preached at *Christ-Church Canterbury*,
On *St. Barnabas-day*.

A Conference betwixt *Abraham* and the
rich Man; of Vision, Revelation and Re-
pentance.

LUKE XVI. 30, 31.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent: And he said unto him; If they bear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

IN these two verses we have before us the sentiments or judgments of two great personages in their different estates and settlements in the other world: viz. *Abraham* and the *rich man*: from whence too we have sufficient warning and direction, how to manage and settle our own affairs, whilst we are on this side that eternal estate. Whether it was a real or supposed interview is not material to decide: the inference is the same
from

from holy writ, tho' it be but a parable (as is most likely) which is this, That there are two estates of the dead, and we have here certain intelligence from both.

1st. We have an account from the *rich man*, who delivers his judgment in the former verse; And he said, *Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them (i. e. his brethren, as was requested) from the dead, they will repent.* And one would think he might be judicious and sensible enough by this time, from his sad experience and grievous torments: and indeed what he says carries a fair appearance of truth, and may have proved so upon many occasions and in many instances; that is, That *vision* being an higher degree of evidence than faith, one from the dead might raise a more powerful conviction, than the old antiquated revelation by *Moses* and the *Prophets*. But upon closer examination, we must by no means allow his opinion to be generally true, or indeed so much as frequently so, or commonly happening; not only because contradicted by a more authentick judge, the patriarch *Abraham*, who declar'd, that *if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead*, which amounts to this much; That a long train of revelation, attested by almighty wonders (such as the *Jews* had) to an unprejudiced person, must prove a more sure conviction, and of more lasting authority, than a transitory vision, tho' never so startling and amazing: but besides, both reason and experience will evince the contrary: for

for, *first*, miracles, if continued, will soon remit their power of conviction, and fall into the common course of nature. There are standing miracles in the world, such as the matter and motion of the celestial orbs, the flux and reflux of the sea, the virtues of the *magnet*, and many other mysteries of nature, that are commonly instanced in, which, like other miracles, are the plain objects of our senses, but beyond the reach of our reason and understanding to give a certain explicit account of them, as we can do of other subjects and phenomena's of common nature.

It is the constancy of their appearance, and their visible continuance, that makes them disregarded, and pass into the common order of providence; and so indeed would all other miracles, if they should be kept up from age to age. Atheists and Scepticks, and resolute and habitual sinners (tho' they are very apt to call out for miracles) would in time find out ways to elude the truth and testimony of such visions; either resolve them into certain second causes, or else into a *deceptio visus*, that our senses were impos'd upon; and perhaps then take occasion to argue on the other side, which, with some, might seem of greater force; *viz.* That the constant and regular order of providence in the government of the world, and the peculiar times and seasons that God hath taken to manifest his will by revelation, if well considered, are a better proof of the being, power and wisdom of the Deity, than any super-natural and violent eruptions

tions of that power, or now and then an extraordinary emissary *from the dead*.

Again, if we argue from experience or matter of fact, there are very few converts upon record, that were made such purely by a vision, or any extraordinary and miraculous appearance of that nature. St. *Paul* indeed, *Acts ix.* is one signal instance, but Christ himself must come on purpose with that startling apprehension: *Saul, Saul! why persecutest thou me?* And besides the vision, to complete his conversion, there was an extraordinary portion of the holy spirit conferred upon him, as had been before upon the Disciples; with the former, *i. e.* the vision, *he was blinded for three days*, ver. 9. till *Ananias* a Disciple *laid his hands upon him*, and then *he received his sight, and was filled with the Holy Ghost*.

Balaam the heathen prophet had seen an angel, and had had many other visions and extraordinary revelations, yet we read nothing of his conversion or repentance beyond a bare wish: *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!* Numb. xxiii. 10. And wishing only, when no further efforts are made, was never allowed to be so much as one step towards a reformation of life.

The *Jews* in the wilderness, tho' they liv'd and subsisted upon miracles, and were gratified with all the variety of vision and wonderful appearances, yet were as subject to murmurings and rebellions, as when they were most stinted, and those extraordinary manifestations in a manner quite shut up.

But

But the *chief Priests* and the *Pharisees*, and the rest of the ruling *Jews*, had in this present age of our Saviour given sufficient testimony of this truth, That vision is not of sure prevalence to work a conversion: For, to omit all other the transcendent manifestations of Christ's power upon earth, when he had raised *Lazarus* from the dead, St. *John* tells us, that the chief Priests consulted how they might put *Lazarus* also to death, resolving to dispatch again out of the world (if they could possibly bring it about) such an insignificant monitor. *John* xii. 10.

The numerous apparitions too from the dead, upon our Lord's passion and giving up the ghost, also his own resurrection from thence (notoriously evident to them, or else they would not have given money to the soldiers, and also this charge, *Mat.* xxviii. 13. saying, *Say ye, His Disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept*) do make it more than probable, that preaching from the grave will in time sound as dull as that from the pulpit: and the eloquent messengers from the dead will soon harangue it to as little purpose as those among the living; for, as yet, *who hath believed* theirs more than our reports!

Thus, you see, we have examples of obstinate infidelity even against vision itself, which is always esteemed as demonstration; or, if that be not possible, at least of resolution of acting as such, and so no real conversion is effected, and the guilt of the idle spectators or auditors much aggravated. And be sure bold and resolute sinners,

sinners, that have out-faced all the rational evidence which arises from a regular and orderly Revelation, will not prove such starters as to be scar'd at every ghost, or be frightened out of their ease and enjoyments by every spectre or goblin from the dead; nay, the noble spirited Atheists, and the high mettled sinners of the world, defy the dullness of *Balaam's* ass, to be stop'd upon the road, when they are upon the career of wickedness, even by an angel himself, and with his sword drawn in his hand.

I say not this, so much to confute the *rich man in hell* (it is not worth while) as the unreasonable expectations of those upon earth, who ever and anon are calling out for miracles, and are angry and become sceptical, because they are not gratify'd with the sight of wonders, to amuse and affright them into a reformation of life, which otherwise they are resolved never to engage in, and so consequently are both unqualified for, and very unworthy of such immediate revelations. And therefore the pretence of the Church of *Rome* herein is very idle and unnecessary as well as vain-glorious, who, well-knowing that they have but poor authority for their corrupt worship and doctrines from the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, set up for a continuance of miracles among themselves; but assuredly wrought by the power of *Satan*, if there be any truth in them; or by the juggling tricks of their Priests, who are his agents, if they be false appearances: For a period hath been long since set to all Christian miracles; and no
Angel

Angel from heaven is of sufficient authority to preach any other gospel. Therefore

2dly. We ought to acquiesce in the more solid judgment and opinion of *Abraham*, the great patriarch and patron of believers: one of brighter understanding than to admit of nothing but sensitive knowledge: one that had been renowned in all sacred records for the sublimity and eminency of his *Faith*, and his entire reliance upon God, what ever apparent reason there might be for distrust. Now that most excellent virtue or grace of faith ceases, when it passes into vision: And he that wants more than scripture revelation, once established by miracles, and founded upon rational motives of credibility, is too obstinate a sinner to be baffled by an apparition, or confuted out of his pleasures by one that comes with a doleful story from his brother *Dives* in hell. Besides, he quits and renounces all the worth and merit that is ascribed to a rational faith: and be sure can never attain to the friendship of him, who by virtue of his faith was called *the Friend of God* — the closest and most honourable communion with him! a friend of the Almighty! and therefore can never be admitted to *Lazarus's* bliss, to repose in *Abraham's* bosom, who is the *father of the faithful* only.

The inference then from this Conference amounts to thus much, *viz.* That the evidence we have of a future estate after this life, is so clear and undeniable an article of faith, that vision itself, tho' in its own nature an higher degree

degree of evidence, cannot probably convince that man, who hath so far renounced his reason as not to submit to such powerful testimonies from divine revelation. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

In order therefore, not to the (too late) confutation of the rich man in torments, but rather therefore to the conviction, if possible, of Atheists and Scepticks upon earth (for be sure in hell there are none such; tho' they go off in shoals from hence, there they presently turn believers with a vengeance, and the faith that might have saved them here, proves there the aggravation of their torments) I say for this purpose we must,

I. In the first place argue upon *Abraham's* topick, that there were sufficient notices from *Moses* and the Prophets, that is, from the Scriptures of the *Old Testament*, concerning the future estate of the dead.

II. We may be allow'd to add the testimony of reason, and the natural suggestions of conscience, which, if sound and regular, must be the voice too of God, that there are such different estates of the dead, as set forth in the holy Scriptures.

III. That these are credentials sufficient to warrant and enforce the preaching repentance, without a personal missionary from the dead.

I. That there were sufficient notices from *Moses* and the *Prophets*, that is to say, from the Scriptures that were then of the *Old Testament*, concerning the future estate of the dead.

Atho' we should let it pass for truth that the promises made to the *Jews* upon their obedience to the law, did not apparently extend any farther than this life; and the judgments and punishments denounced were also temporal, and to be inflicted only in this world, according to the literal sense; yet it was ever the catholick doctrine of the *Jewish* Church, that there was a future estate after this life, generally believ'd and embraced, from *Adam*, *Enoch*, *Noah*, and through all the Patriarchs, as a fundamental article of faith, and the ground of their obedience, and best encouragement to righteousness and true holiness: such an article that needed not to be put express into writing, being so unquestionably and universally retained by tradition, that *Moses* had no occasion to give any particular account of it in his books, as not at all necessary or proper to his subject, which was the history of the creation, and the flood, the lives of the patriarchs, and of all that befell the people of *Israel*, whether in prosperity or adversity, whether free or in bondage, and more especially an account of their judicial and ceremonial law; the sanctions of which were temporal rewards and punishments. For his grand purpose and design being to erect a civil polity or œconomy amongst them (tho' indeed by a divine authority,) those carnal rewards and punishments

ments were most proper to be proposed as the best present and prevalent incitement and terrour to that carnal minded people, and also most suitably fitted to that frame and constitution of carnal ordinances.

But we cannot imagine all those transcendent acts of virtue and piety were done by the patriarchs before the law, upon a bare prospect of earthly advantages, when providence kept much the same course then, that it doth now: and good and righteous men met with difficulties and hardships in the world. As *Jacob* and his sons by *famine*, before they came down into *Egypt*, and their posterity afterwards there, by a long and grievous bondage, whilst the wicked and Heathen about them were oft-times mighty and prosperous.

Therefore those mighty heroick acts recorded of them in the 11th Chap. to the *Hebrews*, were never blazon'd forth by the Apostle, to illustrate the powers of their faith, founded upon temporal promises, but upon those they saw a far off, as he argues in that chap. for they confessed they were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, and *desired a better country, that is a heavenly*, ver. 13, 16.

There are besides passages enough in those books of *Moses* that will at least infer, that it was a doctrine pass'd as granted, tho' not plainly delivered in them.

It is said of *Enoch* that he *walked with God*, and *was not, because God took him*, Gen. v. 24. which the forementioned Apostle to the *He-*

brews (xi. 5.) calls *his translation*, and the *Jews* generally believ'd so, being taken from the earth sooner than his co-temporaries, at three hundred and sixty five years of age. *Enoch's* prophesy was also kept up by and believed amongst them, as *St. Jude* intimates, *Ep. xiv. 15.* and was generally referr'd to a day of judgment. *And Enoch also the seventh from Adam prophesied of these* (meaning those provoking sinners described before) *saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, &c.*

Temporal promises were indeed made to the *Jews* express; because *Moses* was to deal with sensual men, and a temporal or earthly kingdom was to be rais'd and established by him. But their sacrifices were not more express types of that one all-sufficient sacrifice by the blood of Christ, than *Canaan* was a type and emblem of *heaven*: *Tophet* and the valley of *Hinnom* of *hell*: And *Jerusalem* itself of that *Jerusalem* above, or the *new Jerusalem*: *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, expected a *City that had foundations whose builder and maker was God*, as you read in the same 11th Chap. to the *Hebrews*, verse 10. And *Moses*, says that author, verse 26. *had respect to the recompence of reward*; which must be that in the next world; for in this he never arrived at the land of *Canaan*, which was the heaven of this world, as had been declar'd to him before-hand. Once in a great fit
of

of zeal for the people whom he loved; he seem'd to execrate himself, even to all eternity: *Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin. And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.* Exod. xxxii. 32. That dooms-day book, wherein, according to the language of the Scriptures, the actions of mankind are kept recorded unto the day of judgment.

Now as it was most absurd in the *Sadducees* to deny the being of Angels and Spirits, the former of which especially are so often and expressly mentioned in the books of *Moses*, which are their only canonical Scriptures; so was it as ridiculous to deny a future estate after this life, and yet to be so very punctual in the zealous observance of their law to the very letter of it, and even to the hazzard of life and fortune. For it is demonstrable, that the *Jews* in general, as well as *Moses* their law-giver, must have an eye to another recompence of reward beyond this life, because all the possessions and enjoyments belonging to this present life, could be but a very brutal incitement, to such strict observances as they boasted of; when a case may be supposed, (and indeed often fell out in many instances) that they might be put upon the sacrificing of those possessions, and all that was dear and valuable in the world, rather than violate a commandment; and it is very odd and unimaginable to forfeit that by their obedience, which was the only reward of that obedience, if they had no belief or hope of a reward after death.

If from hence we pass among the Prophets

and other holy penmen of the *Old Testament*, we shall meet with many startling expressions of this terrible day of judgment; the Wiseman takes the atheistical bravado to task in a farcical reprehension, Eccles. xi. 9. *Rejoyce, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.* And concludes the whole book with a more express assertion of this doctrine, as the foundation of all religion, and the grand reason for all he had preach'd before. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing whether, it be good, or whether it be evil:* which cannot be meant of a judgment upon earth, because it was notorious then, as well as now, that sinners too often escape giving an account in this world, as well as the punishment due to their crimes, and especially being brought before a formal tribunal of justice, purely for breaking God's commandments. To proceed,

In one of the visions of *Daniel*, nothing is so lively represented as the *day of judgment*, after the manner of the great *Synedrion* or consistory of *Israel*, Dan. vii. 9 — from whence the Rabbins first called it the *day of judgment*. And St. *Jude* from both κρίσις μεγάλης ἡμέρας, the *judgment of the great day*. And by commentators this vision of *Daniel* is parallell'd with a like one of St. *John's* in the 20th chapter of the *Apocalypse*.

Now

Now *Daniel* certainly was not figurative in that description, for in his last chapter, ver. 2. He divides the great appearance at this day of judgment into two parties: *Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

But in fine, whatsoever prophecies throughout the whole *Old Testament* relate to the coming of the *Messias*, are very often as expressive of greater promises of glory than could be looked for or made good in this world. And all the zealous exhortations of the same prophets to a more refined sort of holiness, than what consisted in the punctual observances of the *Levitical* law, and to take them off from that formality, and from confiding in that outward worship, must necessarily denote a prospect of an higher reward, and a respect to a future estate.

I have the longer insisted upon this point, not only to make good the assertion of *Abraham*, viz. of the sufficient notices there were from *Moses* and the *Prophets* of a future estate, without an intelligencer from the dead; but to confute the assertion of many in this age, who maintain (to invalidate or make insignificant the authority of the *Old Testament*) that the *Jews* had no knowledge of this doctrine, but as their obedience was sufficiently excited by temporal promises, so their expectations were terminated in this life.

Authorities out of the *New Testament* are not to our present subject, (for the reference was

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only made to the *Old*) and must surely be need-
less to Christians, as well as too numerous to be
recounted at this time: This doctrine being the
tenour of the whole gospel, and holy writings
of the Apostles, the tendency of all the pro-
mises; and the grand design and end of Christ's
coming into the flesh, to *bring life and immor-
tality to light*: i. e. set it in a clearer light, and
make a plainer discovery of it; which before
was somewhat obscured under shadows and fi-
gures; as also to help us in the way, and to
make the purchase of bliss and glory for us,
and deliver us from the wrath to come. It was
therefore the foundation of all the Apostles
doctrine and preaching, the grand perswasive
to the strictest virtue and holiness in our con-
versations, to work out our salvation with fear
and trembling: for says St. Paul, 2 Cor. v. 10.
*We must all appear before the judgment seat of
Christ, that every one may receive the things done
in his body, according to that he hath done, whe-
ther it be good or bad: Knowing therefore the
terroure of the Lord, we perswade men.* For
what could ever perswade men to renounce the
world and the flesh, but the knowledge or be-
lief of this future estate, so incompatible with
all worldly and carnal pursuits? So that nothing
can be so demonstratively conclusive to all that
acknowledge a revelation from Christ and his
Apostles, than that *there remaineth a rest unto the
people of God, but a most certain and fearful
looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,
which shall devour the adversaries, all that obey*
not

not the laws of God and the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But *Dives's* five brethren had reason as well as revelation to help them out in this discovery, and that (one would think) might have completed their satisfaction without an express from the dead. Therefore, in the second place,

II. We are to bring in the verdict of reason to avouch for this doctrine ; which reason, if it be sound and regular, must be the voice of God too, as well as revelation ; and both together must make up an undeniable evidence, That there must be two such different estates of the dead as set forth in the holy Scriptures, and a judgment to come.

There are innumerable vile wretches, in our days, of the same dissolute lives with the rich man's brethren, and in all probability of much worse principles, (for we live in an improved age for ill morals and ill opinions) who from the plain dealing *Athiests* have (as they would make us believe) made a near approach to reason, and assumed to themselves the name of *Deists* : Their sublime understandings will in great condescension allow the being of a God, but cannot stoop to his revelation, tho' it shines in their faces with the greatest lustre.

These will be judged by *reason* only, as fancying themselves great, or indeed sole masters of it, and therefore the likelier to make it on their own side. St. *Paul's* reasoning on this very subject, cast a great sinner (and a great man too) into a fit of trembling : and did these men argue

gue right, without consulting their pleasures and present satisfactions, their Reason alone might be sufficient to startle them into so much fear as to suspect at least, there possibly may be such a day of accounting for all their actions. And if their Reason desert them here, and doth not argue farther, that in an everlasting concern they ought to act on the securest side, let them never pretend to more *reasoning* in this world.

Let us hearken then to those arguments, that cannot but lye plain in the thoughts of every rational man. It concerns us deeply, and we have gained the greatest point in religion, when we can prove to ourselves, and against all gain-sayers, that there is a *future estate* of everlasting life and everlasting death.

1. Then, if we acknowledge the being of a God, surrounded with all those attributes, or properties, that must essentially belong unto him; as that he was the Creator and continues the governor of the whole world; that he is all-mighty all-knowing, infinitely just and merciful; to whom sin, and all that is contrary to rectitude and goodness, are most opposite, and all the agents thereof are his direct and most provoking enemies; and if we grant too, that all the actions of men are done upon choice (else indeed they would have no sin), and that by the conduct of reason they are able to distinguish betwixt good and evil (for the actions of brutes cannot be accounted for, or be offensive and sinful); and yet in perverseness and enmity to God, and for love of sin, they do *chuse the evil and refuse the good*:

good : Upon these concessions we must necessarily conclude, that God being infinitely powerful and just, must certainly bring man to judgment for this his prevarication ; which often escapes the cognisance and penalties of all human laws, and seldom meets with its due punishment upon earth : Otherwise, sin and satan must be uncontrollable ; and all wicked agents must have the ascendancy over heaven, and God be declared either insensible of his honour, or not able to vindicate it from his avowed enemies.

2. A second Reason must be as conclusive from the contemplation of his providence here below ; where the wicked are equal, if not the better sharers of his temporal goodness : Surely, it must be, because the things of this life are but inconsiderable matters, not the absolute determining tokens of God's good pleasure or anger. But there is another estate for man in the next world, where all shall be adjusted and made up, according to the exactest rules of justice and due proportion. The tyrant, the oppressor, the pyrate, the cheat and impostor, the lascivious wanton, and the filthy voluptuary, all the villains of unrighteousness, and all the devotees of lust, that have gone with triumph and defiance off the stage of the world, shall be brought to the bar of infiniting unerring justice ; where no circumstance of their crimes shall escape an exact scrutiny and trial, nor themselves the eternal vengeance of a despised Almighty power. And then the innocent, the merciful, the righteous, they that have not been allowed, or have virtuously denied

denied themselves the enjoyments and profits of this present life, that have frequently been oppressed and kept under here below, shall be received unto almighty favour, shall be exalted in the face of the whole world, shall for their former sorrows have *fulnefs of joy and pleasures for evermore*. Therefore, if God doth not seem to men to keep an even hand in his providence here in this world, he will most certainly do it in the next ; as he is most certainly just and merciful : Whatsoever by permission, and for reasons not discerned by our eyes, hath passed irregularly here, shall there be adjusted in such equality, that every *mouth shall be stopped*, and all the world of wicked men shall be guilty before God.

3. A third reason we may be furnished with at home from conscience, the inseparable companion of our souls ; that domestick spy upon all our actions, that teizes and torments us with second thoughts, and hinders our digestion in every sin. Now what should be the cause of so much disturbance, of so many throes and pangs of conscience after the commission is over ; when we are sure to escape present justice, and that which in some sins is most dreaded, the knowledge and shame of the world ; when all goes well and roundly with the sinner, and he is come off with success and triumph, and his sin hath been prosperous as well as pleasant.

Surely reason and conscience are not so far asunder, but they may agree in the same sentiments and verdict, and the same man may say,

say, " Surely from the apprehensions of my
" conscience and my reason too, my mind gives
" me, there must be a future estate and a judg-
" ment to come ; when the divine vengeance
" that now is so naturally and irresistibly feared,
" but for the present escaped, shall be the cer-
" tain portion of all *persevering sinners*."

These considerations, without vision or revelation, frightened the very *heathens* into a belief (tho' dark) of a future estate : And tho' we put no stress upon their fables of *Elyzium* and *Tartarus*, and their *three infernal Judges*, because they wanted light for a clearer discovery ; yet the absurdity of those fictions was not so great as a total denial of a truth, which nature and reason had made in them so deep impressions of. And as it is reasonably thought a powerful argument for the proof a deity, that all nations have had some notions of such a supreme being, tho' they have been dark and gross in their apprehensions of him, and so consequently in their worship ; so ought it to pass for as reasonable an argument for the proof of this great point, that mankind hath as generally agreed in the apprehensions of a future judgment, and the rewards and punishments of the next life ; tho' for want of Revelation their accounts of that estate have been mostly made up of ridiculous fictions. The later opinion hath followed the former, and indeed they are inseparable : The belief of a God, and his providential government of the world, as I have already proved, must necessarily infer another estate after this life, and the certainty of a judgment to come. But an enquiry still remains,

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remains, which is the last I purposed to speak to, *viz.*

III. Whether these are not authorities and reasons sufficient to incite us to Repentance, without a personal missionary from the dead? Most certainly they are. As many reasons and motives therefore as we have to embrace the truth of this doctrine, so many have we to enforce Repentance and the Reformation of our lives, and one more (which one would think should be of irresistible prevalence upon rational men, as I have intimated already) that in all, but be sure in everlasting concerns, it is good to make ourselves as sure as we can. If all the fore-mentioned authorities and reasons amount but to a probability, we have still this one argument, which is as demonstrable as vision it self can be, That according to all the measures and principles we move by in matters of this world, we in common prudence choose the safest side; so then much more upon the dismal prospect of eternity, ought we with the utmost labour, and without the least delay, to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*. Who is so bold a sinner, as to dare to throw aside the thoughts of immediate repentance, that hath but once a-day this suspicion or surmise in his mind, That God may possibly one day bring him to judgment, for all the evil thoughts, words, and actions of his life?

That I may quote some thing from the Saint of this day; there is a very solemn admonition in the Catholick Epistle (as it is called) that goes under

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under the name of St. Barnabas : *Remember the day of judgment, day and night.*

Let us then, as rational men, of wise and provident fore-cast, seriously engage in this duty, which our numerous sins, nay our common lapses and failures do every day and night call upon us to put in practice as absolutely necessary to salvation, and to secure us from (allowing for suspicion or distrust) that possible or probable wrath to come.

Let us call out for helps and assistances to promote and forward this blessed work ; and more especially for the influences and operations of the Holy Spirit. Why ! These are miraculous and supernatural ; and for these we are encouraged and invited to pray : It is the most acceptable petition, and will be granted without reserve. A vision cannot be a truer miracle than this divine influence : For that too (I mean a vision) should it be granted without God's co-operating grace and Holy Spirit, can never raise a sound repentance and a true conversion ; and he is altogether unworthy of such an extraordinary blessing, out of the common course of nature, whose perverse curiosity must be gratified with an apparition from the dead, else will never believe any revelation, tho' never so well avouched and established by an almighty power, nor any miracles done out of his own sight.

It is said, *there is joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth*, and so to accomplish this great work, we may be allowed to wish if not pray, for all informations and perswasives from
thence

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thence: That God would send not a common messenger, such as *Lazarus*, whose person might have been but mean and contemptible before upon earth, but an Angel to preach repentance, and raise in us by his own resemblance of purity and brightness, all abhorrence of our own impurities and corruptions: Nay, legions of Angels we want to guard us against all the powerful enemies of our souls. But as he did not think fit to send them in defence and vindication of his own Son; nor now to pour down upon every occasion of incredulity, such mighty forcible influences of his Holy Spirit, as was necessary at the first establishment and confirmation of our most holy religion; so we may be sure that the same God, who hath no *pleasure in the death of a sinner*, but the greatest, that he should repent and live, hath given us not only sufficient means and motives for the practice of that duty, but such too as are most proper and suitable, and will make the performance of it most acceptable to himself.

For as that repentance looks very suspicious, which is forced by some exceeding and startling pressure upon us; and we therefore justly call into question a death-bed repentance, because it is at a time when our lusts and appetites have forsaken us; we can sin no more, and darkness is before us: So is that but a disorderly repentance, which we must be frightened into; or when we must as 'twere by main force be pulled into the house of prayer and humiliation by Angels, as *Lot* at *Sodom* was into his own.

Re-

Repentance is to know ourselves and our state and condition (which was ever reputed the height of wisdom;) to be sensible of our miscarriages, and to amend them, to discover our wants and ails, and to find out ways for relief; and, therefore, is to be undertaken and engaged in, not in a fright and hurry, but upon sedate and serious consideration, and when we have our wits about us.

Now it is a strange thing, that reason must be scared into so reasonable and necessary a duty by ghastly apparitions, as children and weakly people are frightened by tales and stories of them, how fabulous soever: and it is truly but a very odd expedient, to be almost frightened out of our wits, on purpose to recover them. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,* says our Lord; and no doubt as peculiarly blessed are they who have had no visions from the dead, or extraordinary summons any other way, but have repented upon the common rational motives to that duty, upon the incitements from the revelation and standing rule of God's holy will and word, together with the ordinary dispensations of his grace, which will never be denied to an humble suppliant and penitent that is setting about that great work. To call for signs and visions after such ample revelation, is tempting of God, and doing the utmost despite to the spirit of grace. It is the presumption and blaspheming impudence of Atheists and vile unbelievers, and tho' we cannot say Their curiosity will ever be satisfied, yet it will one

day most certainly cease by a doleful experience.

In a word, God doth not delight to save by the violent course of vision and threatening messages from the dead, nor always by sending down his spirit with a noise and sound from heaven, as *of a rushing mighty wind*, and with the *fiery appearances of cloven tongues*; he did it once for all; but rather desires now to be heard in a *still small voice*, as he once discovered himself to *Elijah*. *1 Kings* xix. 12. and so to be approached unto in the soft and gentle methods of repentance and faith, which may be managed and carried on by the conduct of our reason, and the promised assistances of the holy spirit; upon which, obedience in a great measure becomes an act of our own choice, and consequently such a free-will-offering as must be most acceptable in the sight of our heavenly father. It is said of *St. Barnabas*, that he was a *good man, full of the Holy Ghost, and of Faith*, and *thereby much people were added to the Lord*; a great promoter of the Church's welfare, a dispenser and conveyancer of charitable relief for its increase and support; as you have heard read this day from the portion of Scripture appointed for the *Epistle*. Let us endeavour to come up to his character, and ever pray to almighty God who did endow that holy Apostle with such *singular gifts of the Holy Ghost*, that he would not leave us destitute of the like gifts and graces; That he would pour down into our hearts such a portion of his holy spirit, as may raise our understandings
into

into a full persuasion and conviction of this great fundamental of our faith, which lies so plain before us, both from reason and revelation, and also may influence our wills and affections to engage us in the soonest, soundest, and most lasting repentance for our sins, and reformation of our lives; which we beg for Jesus Christ's sake,

To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be ascribed (as most due) all Majesty, Adoration and Power, this time forth and for ever more. *Amen.*

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